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KAORUN DIRECTED A LASCIVIOUS SMILE AT ME.
「DOES IT EXCITE YOU?」

ELNI WORE IT SOMEWHAT ELEGANT. HER BRILLIANT SILVER HAIR WAS HANGING DOWN FREE. WHICH GAVE HER AN UNUSAL NEAT AURA AND THE BEAUTIFUL KIMONO WAS SHOWING OFF ELNI'S CHARM.

Prologue

“—I don’t think I’ll come back here again.”
That voice of Elni was so quiet that it was about to be erased by the blowing wind.
Elni had waited for me in front of the school gate. Walking side by side with her, I was on the mundane way home like always. Druing that, a gust of wind might have been the trigger for it.
In the cold wind of winter, Elni swayed her silver hair that was tied up in twintails… She mentioned that she planned to go somewhere warm, because she was bad with the cold. That she could relieved go on a trip, since her worries was gone.
…Elni’s worries. It must have been Machina and me.
Machina had tried to return to the demon realm, thinking that she would lose an important person again like with her mother, due to her being an hybrid devil. She received the feelings from the people, who watched over her close by, and now tried to live in the human world.
Moreover, I believed that I too could grow up a bit from my weak self with an inferior complex. And while she didn’t speak it out, Elni’s worries might have not been just Machina and me. For example, the reliable older sister of our house: Luna. My precious friend, Gogyou Hijiri and her maid, Kaorun aka Kaoru.
Each of them had their own worries or doubts. Even so, they eagerly moved forward. Thinking back on it, meeting with everyone and spending time together brought about a little change. Surely everyone, me included, was changing in a positive way.
However, I wondered what Elni was thinking when she saw her friends like that. Did she think we could live on smiling like always, even without her?
…There was no way it would be like always without you, Elni.
Instinctively I bit on my lips and stopped, whereas Elni softly narrowed her red eyes and looked at me somewhat sadly… smiling faintly.
“Shinobu, don’t make such a face. You don’t need to be sad. I expect everyone to forget me in no time.”

“No way we’ll forget you.”
The weird girl that called herself a Goddess. One of the freeloaders at our place. Elni always did stupid things and made us all laugh. If we wouldn’t see each other ever again from now on… When I thought so, I couldn’t bear it any more and squeezed out my voice.
“Did you not have fun with everyone? Why do you say such—”
“I told you before, right?” With that, she cut into my words and forced herself to smile.
“I cannot… become your family.”
…Just like back then. Previously, when a typhoon hit the city, the tent she was living in was blown away and on my invitation, Elni lived with us for a while. But she soon tried to separate herself from us. She said that she couldn’t become family with us…
I suddenly noticed at this point. While everyone changed with the passing of seasons, only Elni might not have changed the least. Maybe her distance from back then still existed even now? I most likely wanted to deny that. So I quietly lent her my ears, as to not miss any of her words.
“Sure, it’s fun with everyone, but I’m better off alone after all. I like being alone. That won’t ever change.”
Then why did she smile like she was about to cry?
“To begin with, I don’t settle in one single place. I always thought about leaving this place one day. I’m different from all of you. Even when I stay with you all the time, it’ll only make the parting painful. So I’ll go on a trip again, like I have always done. That’s the right way.”
Then why was her voice trembling so much? Why did she try to leave, saying she liked being alone?
Elni’s invariant feelings. I didn’t want to accept that no matter what, so I tried to find a lie in her words, but even so I couldn’t find her real intentions and kept biting on my lips while standing around. Despite that,
“Hey Elni, can you postpone your leave a bit?”
Wanting to tie her down, I slowly brought up the matter.
“You know, it’s Christmas soon. Let’s have a party with everyone this year. So until then… stay with us.”
“…A Christmas party, huh.”
As she either noticed my intentions or pretending not to notice them,

“Sounds kinda fun. Okay. I’ll stay at your house until Christmas is over. I’ve a lot to prepare anyway.”
Elni erased the earlier sadness from her expression and brightened her smile. While stimulating her voice brightly, but clenching her small fists… she showed her usual smile. And like that, she started to walk down the road home full of energy.
…My house. The words from Elni. She might not consider the place we were returning to now her home. Elni proceeded, still smiling. I could reach her right away with my hand… yet for some reason, I got the feeling that the distance to her was widening. Elni’s back looked so small that it seemed like she would disappear on her own like this.

Chapter 01
The lonely Goddess

The villagers raised shouts of joy and everyone smiled, except one that wore a distorted expression in disbelief and spilled endless tears from the eyes.
The cheered on little girl only looked puzzled at that one woman.
At that time, the little girl didn't knew the meaning of the woman's tears. The little girl wanted the woman to smile. Originally, the woman was the type to smile brightly. A bright smile like a sunflower. The smile of the most precious person to the little girl. The little girl loved seeing that smile.
That was why the little girl tried to make the woman smile. She couldn't talk to the woman as much as before anymore, but every time she met her, she cracked stupid jokes or complimented her clothes. The little girl just wanted to see her smile, so no matter how painful it was, she always kept smiling.
Maybe that hurt the woman even more. The woman's smile always looked kind of forced. Even while spilling tears, the woman smiled somewhat forcibly.
…The sunflower the little girl loved so much was no longer in the expression of the woman.
Unknown to the little girl, the woman was always crying. She kept crying with "Why her". But one day the woman heartfelt declared to the little girl.
"You know, I'll definitely live a long life. I'll give my best to live a long life until you finish your task. So when you return to being a normal human and everyone allows it, then let's… play again together then."
Her precious person that was always crying. The person smiled at her again after various years. There was still a fickle sadness left in her eyes, but even so, she smiled lovely.
This trivial thing was something the little girl had always eagerly waited for. Therefore, the little girl held out her little finger to the woman.
"It's a promise. Let's definitely play together again."
"Yes. It's a promise…"

A humble pinky promise. A promise that wouldn't be fulfilled. The little girl innocently believed it. Without knowing that this promise some day would turn into something meaningless. Without knowing that this promise would hurt the most precious person to the little girl. She always believed in it. And,
"…Sorry, ***-san."
This promise would forever torment the little girl.
After waking up from her dream, the little girl spilled big tears from her eyes. No matter how much time passed, the little girl kept crying all alone even now without anyone noticing it…

♥♥!

Her neatly arranged room. The quiet room was filled with the faint fragrances of flowers that came from her shining blonde hair, the sweet fragrance of her own body and the somewhat rough and agonizing breathing that leaked through her light lip lips. While the sound of that agitated breathing reached my earlobes— she, Luna glitzy wetted her clear emerald green eyes and flushed her smooth and glossy cheeks.
When I casually dropped my gaze, I could confirm the cleavage of her voluminous breasts flushed into a pink colour through the unbuttoned chest area of her shirt.
Also, due to the two breasts, which boasted with their overwhelming volume, the buttons around her chest area were certainly undone. But regardless of that, the ample fruits were constrained within the shirt and seemed to burst out any moment. After wordlessly watching her bewitching appearance, I slowly pulled out *that* from Luna's body.
"Ahh… Mm…"
Charmingly twisting her slender body, she fell back onto the bed again.
The moment Luna leaned her back onto the bed, her round breasts bounced from the vibration.
Moreover, her golden hair spread radiant like silk threads on top of the snow-white sheets, where it was bathed in the sunlight that shone through the gap between the curtains, which produced

sparkling bright light waves.
It was a sight that inadvertently fascinated me.
But I frowned and starred at the something that I just pulled out of her body, whereupon Luna timidly directed her wet eyes at me while still breathing roughly.
“Uhn… Shinobu-san… Hah… How is… my body?”
“…Really pretty. So sexy and wonderful. I can’t take my eyes off you tonight.”
“Uhm, I am happy for the praise, but it is not night right now and I can somewhat tell that it is a joke. Please answer me honestly.”
“Ehm, what can I say, days like this do happen.”
I tried to equivocate again, but it had not the slightest effect and Luna mixed her tone with worry.
“I guess it was not good?”
“To be honest… It’s the worst.”
Without awkwardly concealing it, I declared so, whereupon tears faintly started to dwell up in Luna’s eyes.
“I am sorry, Shinobu-san. I…”
“No, no, it certainly isn’t good, but nothing you need to worry about. You can’t do anything about it.” saying so, I looked at the thing that was inside her earlier— the thermometer and continued my words with a soft tone.
“Anyone catches a cold. You also have a fever of 38.5°C. Rest properly until you get better, okay?”
“But at least preparing lunch should be…”
“Yes, out of the question. You’re in no state to be cooking. Don’t leave your room until you feel better.”
“…Too bad.”
When I made my tone a little bit more commanding, Luna hung her head while knitting her eyebrows. To be honest, I didn’t want her to make such a face, but this was Luna we’re talking about. If I hadn’t said that, she might push herself again like this morning.
While putting away the thermometer in my hands, I showed a wry smile and thought back on it.
It was a certain Saturday morning. Suppressing a yawn, I showed up in the dining kitchen, where the breakfast, made by my mother on a rare occasion, was ready on the dining table with everyone but Luna present.

…Where was Luna?
When I doubtfully tilted my head, my mother shrugged her shoulders and gave an explanation.
Apparently Luna looked feverish when she saw her in the kitchen, and tried to cook dressed in only a white shirt, her sleeping clothes, while staggering around. Seeing that, my mother took her to her room without questions.
After I heard the story while taking my meal, I watched off my mother, who had to go to work even though it was a holiday, then came to check upon Luna… But even though she had a cold, she tried to make breakfast, huh. Still showing a wry smile, I pulled the blanket over her again, whereupon Luna placed her cheek on the pillow and dropped her voice.
“It is the long-awaited holiday, yet it seems that I cannot play with you today.”
“Well, we can play another time. More importantly, is there anything you want? You got a naughty body, yet you’re rarely naughty yourself. At least at a time like this, you can act spoiled all you want.”
“…Will you listened to my wilfulness?”
“Yeah, granting one or two selfishness of a girl is a man’s reliability. If you want, I can even sing you a lullaby with my proud baritone voice. Just say the word.”
“Well then— Please kiss me.”
A instant answer without hesitation. Moreover, it was coupled with a lovely smile. Her emerald green eyes were sparkling brightly with anticipation. This was troublesome. My heartbeat jumped up and if I were to relax, her glamorous lips would draw me in, but I withstood it and decided to fudge my answer.
“Luna, sorry, but a kiss is impossible. If I did that, it would defeat the purpose of me coming here to nurse you. Because one kiss from me would surely rob you of all your strength and raise your fever.”
“Then please let me kiss you.”
…Not only didn’t she retort, but she also gave me a hard request. Indifferent to my agitation, Luna straightened up her upper body a bit languid due to the cold and reached out both her arms towards me like she was going to hug me. In regards, I kept cladding myself in composure and stopped her movements by softly putting up my

palm.
“Stop, Luna. You’re too charming right now. If I get a kiss from you like that, I certainly won’t be able to hold myself back and repay you with a kiss. But when that happens, nursing you’ll become pointless like before. Sorry, but give up on the kiss.”
“Ehm, if a kiss does not work, would you lay next to until I fall asleep?”
“Mhm… Nope.”
“You are not even trying to obfuscate it anymore!?”
“I’m out of ideas. Sorry to betray your expectations. I’ll come up with a sweet nothings for the next time. So forgive me. Sorry, but it doesn’t seem like I’ll be able to listen to your request today.”
After all, Luna with a cold was sexier than usual.
Her lightly flushed and smooth skin. Her lovely breathing. Her bewitchingly disarranged clothes.
If I were to carelessly listen to her request… it probably would really stop to be a nursing. I was worried if my reasoning would last.
When I had such fears, Luna apparently gave up, albeit looking a bit regretful, and lay down once again on the bed… After a while, I could hear small sleeping sounds.
Now then, it seemed that Luna hadn’t eaten anything yet, so I should go prepare some porridge while I can. After taking a look at her lovely sleeping face, I quietly left her room and crossed my arms.
Mhm, I wanted to make porridge right away, but… sadly enough, I couldn’t cook. And the other girls, not counting Luna and my mother, were just like me. For now, I should look up how to make porridge on the internet.
While I thought like that, I got down the stairs, whereupon I ran into a girl with maid clothes in the hallway.
She was a resident of our house and the red-haired queen that was elected as the student president of our school the other day: Machina Liebelei Orangelo.
Amber almond eyes. Straight, long and beautiful red hair. Outstanding and varying proportions. The maid clothes she wore suited her surprisingly well, making her extremely cute.
But, why was she wearing maid clothes? While I doubtfully tilted my head, Machina faced me and asked a bit worried.
“Shinobu, how’s my sister?”

“Kind of erotic.”
“Eh? She’s always natural erotic— cough, she’s always sexy.”
“…I’ll pretend I didn’t hear the ‘natural erotic’ just now. Anyway, she’s a rather high fiver, 38.5°C. Right now she’s sleeping peacefully.”
While stopping the jokes for now, I changed the topic to what bothered me.
“By the way, what’s up with these maid clothes?”
“I, well, borrowed them from Elni. You know, my sister often wears maid clothes when she does the house chores.”
“Yeah, it really gives off the image of a devoted maid.”
Luna seemed to really like the maid clothes she got from Kaorun on her birthday, so she habitually used them when she was doing the house chores…. While recalling that, I gave an agreeable response, whereupon Machina flushed her cheeks a bit and continued.
“My sister caught a cold and Tomoe-san is out of the house too, so I plan to do the house chores instead today. So I put on maid clothes like my sister.”
While explaining so, Machina fleetingly stole a glance at me.
“I, I never really did any chores before, but I can’t always rely on my sister, right? I’ll use this opportunity to learn the chores and afterwards I’ll do them in turns with my sister. I’ll wear the maid clothes again then. These maid clothes, you know.”
Blushing even more, she stole another glance at me again to check my reaction, appealing to her maid clothes. She obviously wanted me to compliment her, so in order to respond to her expectation, I reached out my hand towards her head.
“Good girl, good girl. You’re great, Machina. It might be a lot of work, but hang in there.”
“Yes, I know. I’ll give my best right away— wait, where’re you going, Shinobu!”
After petting her head, I turned on my heel, whereupon Machina took my arm reserved. She must have been angry, since I treated her like a child. So I thought, but apparently my prediction was wrong and Machina timidly asked with still red cheeks.
“Ehm, Shinobu, don’t you have anything else to say after seeing me in these clothes?”
Tilting my head again with “Anything else to say?”, I looked at Machina’s clothes once more.

She had said that she borrowed in from Elni, but she wore these maid clothes before too when we had a cooking contest with Hijiri at our house.
An elegant dark-blue one piece and a snow white apron with frills. A maid hair ribbon on her head. Her voluminous breasts seemed to fall out from her boldly exposed chest area at any moment, and her white thighs peeking out from her short skirt along with her beautiful, long legs were a feast for the eyes.
To be honest, I was captivated, so I decided to refrain from my usual jokes and reply honestly.
“It looks good on you, Machina. When you use respective speech too now, you might look like a real maid.”
“…Really? Will I be like your favourite devoted maid?”
“My favourite devoted maid? I don’t know where you got that weird information from, but you look cute. You got good figure, so you look good in about everything.”
For now I gave her my honest impression, whereupon Machina sparkled her amber eyes, said “Thanks, Shinobu. I’m happy you praised me.” and spread both her arms to not only hug me, but also lovely kiss my cheeks by making smooch sounds with “*kiss*… *kiss*…”.
S- Somehow even Machina started to make physical contact like this lately…
However while I got the feeling that Machina’s kisses weren’t on the level of a greeting, but had a deeper meaning to it, yet I currently had my hands full with holding down my cheeks, which were about to form a grin. Her wet, light pink lips. I was about to become spellbound by that soft sensation, whereupon Machina turned her back to me with a smile.
“Well then, Shinobu, I’ll prepare lunch now, so wait in anticipation.”
“Yeah, okay. I’m looking forward to it. While you’re at it, make some porri—”
No, wait, I couldn’t rely on her. Although it was rude towards her, Machina’s cooking skills were devastating. She was no good. Suddenly returning to my senses, I felt some of my blood leaving my head, whereas Machina disappeared into the dining kitchen while humming on a rare occasion.
…I can’t stop her like that.

Lightly scratching my head, I moved in front of the door of the dining kitchen. When I secretly snuck a peek inside to check the situation, there wasn't just Machina in there, but also a girl wearing a cat apron.
Adorable big eyes. Fine chiselled features that somewhat reminded you of a kitten. A short and slender figure. The girl with the innocent image was my little sister, Nanjou Nazuna, who was despite her appearance an 8th grader and the captain of the karate club.

Apparently Nazuna was looking at a cooking book together with Machina and the two of them were having a happy chat while smiling. She must have heard the circumstances from Machina even before me. That Nazuna was wearing an apron too must meant that she was going to help with the cooking.
Both Machina and Nazuna had a bright expression… which made me

lose all will to stop them.
Even if the cooking failed, I would take responsibility and eat it everything, prepared to die. But I still had to do something about the porridge.
While such thoughts crossed my mind, I casually set foo into the living room, whereupon I suddenly saw bright silver hair in the corner of my vision. Apparently someone else was here before me. That person, Elni said in the heating table, rested her cheek on the table and was sleeping pleasantly.
A defenceless appearance like having a peace of mind. Long eyelashes and an innocent expression. You might call it the sleeping face of an angel. A really heart-warming sight. Regardless of that, unrest spread in my heart bit by bit as I recalled, while I watched Elni's sleeping face.
I… cannot become your family, Shinobu. Her words from the other day. Elni truly behaved like always, as if these words had been a lie. She hung around everyone like always, she showed a smile like always… not giving off the slightest clue of sadness.
So I wanted to believe that everything of that day had been a dream, but I certainly was pondering if it was right to stop Elni too. Either way, the pain in my chest I had back then didn't disappear in the last few days.
But I concealed that and brightly called out to the sleeping Elni.
"Elni, if you sleep under the heating table, you'll catch a cold too."
"…Idiot's don't catch colds… Even if I catch one, I won't notice it… Since I'm an idiot…"
Quite the spiritless reaction. The unrest I felt earlier faded in no time and at the same time, my prankish nature was awakened. Unable to restrain myself, I reached out for the mandarin basket on the table and carefully placed one orange on her head.
"…She isn't waking up at all."
On the unchanged pure sleeping face was now one mandarin. It was a bit interesting. But I felt bad for teasing her too much. I took the mandarin off Elni's head, peeled it and brought one piece of it closer to her mouth, softly calling out to her like that.
"Here, a mandarin. Wake up, Elni."
I tried to wake her up according to my initial goal, but Elni slowly opened her cherry lips, only to devour the mandarin and smile

broadly in happiness. But there were no signs at all that she woke up. I inadvertently showed a smile and after feeding Elni a couple of mandarin pieces, I poked her cheek with my index finger.
“Elni, if you don’t wake up, I won’t give you any more mandarins.”
“Mm… *chomp*…”
“Hey, my finger isn’t a mandarin.”
Elni wrapped her mouth around my fingertip, as she mistook it, and started to play-bite it.
Moreover, she opened her pink lips wider and softly took my index finger in it. Her smooth tongue entangle around my finger, licked it gently and sometimes pecked sweet kisses on my fingertip with her well-formed lips.
Her wet tongue, warm mouth and sweet small lips. Continuously receiving the sensation of these, I felt my cheeks getting hot, whereupon the accordion curtain, the partition between the dining kitchen and living room, opened and Machina showed up, doubtfully tilting her head as soon as she saw us.
“What’s Elni doing?”
“…Guess she’s hungry?”
When I replied so with a wry smile, Machina dropped her gaze down to Elni and smiled softly.
“She’s sleeping so soundly.”
“Yeah, nothing’s waking her up. Now she’s sleeping while chewing on my finger. Still, even though she wakes up early in the morning, she’s always nodding off.”
“She must have a light sleep. Elni actually has trouble falling asleep.”
Machina probably knew that, since she shared a room with Elni.
Machina clouded her expression a bit and when I pulled my finger out of Elni’s mouth a bit surprised, it apparently made her wake up.
Elni slowly opened her eyelids, raised her head and looked at us drowsy.
Rubin-red eyes. You could clearly catch a glimpse of sleepiness in these big eyes and I rested my hand on Elni’s shoulders with a joke.
“So, Elni, was it delicious?”
“Yeah, I had a dream of eating mandarin ice-cream.”
Nodding with drowsy eyes, Elni absent-minded shifted her gaze to Machina.
“Machina, I’m hungry. Wanna eat some snacks together?”

“Leave the snacks for the afternoon, Elni. I’m preparing lunch right now. Nazuna’s helping me, so wait in anticipation, okay.”
“…The Goddess will now go back to sleep until bath time. She neither desires snacks or food. Until dinner, that is.”
Her sleepiness must have been blown away at once. Unlike Nazuna, she knew of Machina’s cooking skills, so Elni placed her cheek onto the table again and turned a bit blue in the face.
On the other hand, Machina didn’t seem to notice her sentiment and in a certain way, she declared the death penalty with “I’ll wake up on when lunch is ready then” and a smile. Next, she shifted her gaze smiling towards me.
“By the way, Shinobu, is there anything you want to eat at lunch?”
“I want to eat you.”
“Eh? You want to eat me? Then go ahea— wait, don’t have your mind in the gutter at noon already! T- To begin with, I’m, well, not that easy to eat!”
“Unfortunately for you, I have a big appetite. I’ll get a taste of you by all means— is what I would like to say, but anything’s fine as long as it’s eatable. Do your best without pushing it.”
She probably came here to ask for any wishes regarding lunch. But I had nothing particular in mind, so I replied frivolous, whereupon Machina flushed her cheeks with “I’ll try asking Nazuna…” and headed for the dining kitchen. In regards, Elni watched her off, then opened her mouth a bit worried.
“Hey Shinobu, Machina seriously intends to cook. You know her skills too, right? Shouldn’t we stop her?”
“I can only have faith right now.”
“That Machina’s cooking will succeed?”
“…That a miracle will occur.”
“Shinobu, even if you wait for it, a miracle won’t occur. Miracles are something you create with your own hands.”
Along with an unusual cool remark, Elni took one step forward to the dining kitchen.
“This calls for my services. I’ll show Machina and Nazuna what real cooking is. You wait here while eating some mandarins or so, Shinobu. I’ll show you a miracle at a leisure tea time.”
“You’re so cool that I’m going to fall for you, but… can you actually cook?”

“I might not look like it, but I actually got the features of a good housewife and mother.”
“Good housewife and mother? What the? If you wanted to make me laugh, that didn’t really work, you know?”
“H- How rude! You’re only able to say that now! I’ll make you laugh to your heart’s content with my delicious cooking! Don’t blame me when your cheeks spasm!”
…Let alone my cheeks, I hope my whole body wouldn’t start to spasm.
When another rude remark like that crossed my mind, Elni headed over to Machina and Nazuna full of motivation and I could hear their voices from the kitchen right away.
Amidst that, I killed some time by eating the earlier peeled mandarin, but I couldn’t shake off my unrest after all, so I swiftly moved to the dining kitchen, checking up on their doing.
There my vision fell onto Elni wearing a pink apron. She was pushing on the preparation surprisingly skilful and taught Machina and Nazuna how to cook with a smile.
“Listen you two, when you cut with the knife, make a paw with the other hand.”
“Ah, I know that. Like this, right? Meow, meow~”
“Yeah, that’s good, Nazucat. Meow, meow~”
While cutting the vegetables, Elni and Nazuna started to make music with a bright melody, whereupon Machina seemingly got hooked on by them.
“Meow, meow~ Three cats are cooking together… cough. Forget that. Pretend you didn’t hear that…”
She spontaneously hummed a song, but made a completely turn-around from her sweet voice. Looking down along with a cough, Machina turned red up to her ears and lowered her voice. Seeing that, Nazuna commented with “Just like Luna-oneechan”. Next she happily resumed the cute song.
While watching Machina and Nazuna like that, Elni smiled gentle and instructed them on the cooking. Sometimes she cracked a joke or softly gave them advices, just as if she was their older sister…

…What a surprise. Various minutes passed since then. An appetizingly flavour hung in the air of the dining kitchen and on the table were Elni’s cooking, fried rice with soup and salad, beautiful

lined up.
When I put the fried rice into my mouth driven by my appetite, the rice had a crispy texture and a definite deliciousness spread in my mouth with a light seasoning. Furthermore, the soup had a refined taste of chicken carcass while the salad was colourful and fresh.
It was surprisingly good. While I ate lunch together with Machina, Elni and Nazuna, I mentally licked my tongue and casually shifted my gaze around, whereupon there was a crock on the stove. It seemed that while making lunch, Elni even prepared porridge for the sick Luna. She was really versatile. Unable to hide my surprise any longer, I lowered my head a bit towards Elni.
“Elni, sorry for making fun of you earlier. You can really cook. All of it tastes so good.”
“Fufu, I told you I actually got the features of a good housewife and mother. Chores are my speciality. It was me too, who cleaned the windows in the living room, you know?”
“First time I hear that… Still, where did you learn to cook?”
“Various places…”
A vague answer. In contrast to her usual smile, her tone was a bit dispirited so that you might fail to hear it. What feelings were she hiding behind that smile? I strained my eyes to find out and looked at Elni, whereas Machina interjected softly.
“Hey Elni, if you don‘t mind, could you teach me again?”
“Mh? Me? Instead of me, Luna would be—”
“I want you” declared Machina without hesitation, whereupon Elni widened her eyes a bit, then flushed her cheeks happily.
“I can’t say anything back when you insist like that. Fine. I’ll pass on my secret techniques to you, Machina. Still, just how much do you love me?”
“As much as my sister— wait, no! J- Just averagely. Anyway, it’s a promise, okay? Teach me until I can properly cook. You have to, Elni.”
Machina grabbed Elni’s sleeve, partly to make sure, partly to fawn on her. Indifferent to their conversation, Nazuna was engrossed in the meal for a while now, just saying “So good”. Then Elni looked at each of us.
“…Somehow I get know why Luna’s cooking meals so happily every day.”

She showed a smile different from usual. It was a smile with a kind of mature composure. Until the cheerful lunch was over, she kept that expression…

After lunch, I left the cleaning up to Machina and Nazuna, and went to Luna's room together with Elni. On the tablet in my hands were the crock with the porridge, a bowl, a Chinese spoon, a cold medicine and also a cup with natural water.
…How was Luna doing? I hoped she had gotten a bit better. After knocking, I peeked into the room, whereupon Luna leaked rough "Ah… Hah, Hah…" breathing from her glamorous lips, as her fever might have gone up, and seemingly was in pain.
In regards, Elni knitted her eyebrows worried when she saw that, and eagerly approached her, getting into the bed for some reason.
"…Hey, what're you doing?"
"As you can see, laying next to her. I'm sharing my energy with Luna."
Unknown if she was serious or joking, Elni tightly embraced Luna, whereupon Luna relaxed her expression somewhat happy and slowly opened her eyelids as she had apparently woken up.
"Eh? Huh? Elni-chan?"
When Luna widened her eyes a bit, Elni smiled faintly and replied.
"Sorry for waking you up, Luna. I made some porridge… You think you can eat it?"
"Ah, yes. I want to. You made it, Elni-chan?"
"Yeah! I worked hard for you! There's no better spice than love!"
Cracking such a joke, Elni took the tablet from me, grabbed the spoon, filled some of the porridge into the bowl and started to cool the rice eagerly with "Fuh~ Fuh~". Next she carried the porridge towards Luna's mouth with "Open wide~".
Upon that, Luna opened her well-formed lips and eat the porridge without hesitation, as she knew about Elni's cooking skills, smiling with "So good". On the other hand, I alternatively looked at their smiling faces, then spoke out the words I was reminded of.
"You two get along so well."
"Fufu, you got all jealous, didn't you, Shinobu. Luna and I are so close that we often take a nap together. Luna's breast pillow is really comfortable. There's no better pillow than Luna's breasts."
"…Aren't her thighs great too?"

While I replied jokingly to Elni, Luna proudly puffed up her voluminous chest.
“Shinobu-san, Elni-chan is amazing. Whenever I am tired or busy, she secretly helps out with the house chores. She also listens to my worries, helps me practice a game and taught me how to use a cell phone.”
Even while showing a smile and saying so, Luna suddenly changed her expression into a wry smile.
“But it is enough for today. I can eat the porridge by myself. Saying this now might be too late, but I do not want you to catch my cold. So Elni-chan—”
“Luna, stop being so reserved, okay?”
Softly cutting into her words, Elni slowly reached out her hand for Luna’s head.
“You don’t have to worry about passing on your cold. Both Shinobu and I love you so much that we wouldn’t mind catching your cold. Of course the same applies to Machina, Nazucat and Tomoe-san too. So you don’t need to show any reservation.”
“…Okay. Thank you, Elni-chan.”
Receiving Elni’s heartfelt words, Luna damped her eyes a bit and nodded. After she finished eating the porridge by getting fed, Luna gave Elni a hug as a present. Elni accepted that with a smile, but after a while she clapped her hands as she remembered something.
“Luna, give me a minute.”, leaving behind these words, she left the room.
On the other hand, Luna watched after Elni a bit sadly, then stared at me with passionate eyes, spreading both her arms spoiled with “Shinobu-san, Shinobu-san”.
She most likely wanted to get hugged. If possible I wanted to meet her expectations. However, thanks to the embarrassment, I kept it at only petting her head, but
“Mm… That, feels good. Please do more.”
If this had been a hug, it would have been risky…
Luna with a cold was indeed extremely erotic. I was just normally petting her head, yet she leaked a charming moaning for some reason, so I got rather fraught.
But to not expose that, I kept softly petting her head, whereupon Elni came back into the room with a light knock. For some reason she

was carrying a white towel and as soon as she held it out to me, she made an unbelievable suggestion with a smile.
“Shinobu, Luna’s sweating a bit due to the fever. Wipe her body with this.”
“…No, no. What’re you saying? How did it come to this? Why me? And why are you looking like you don’t mind it, Luna?”
“Because I do not mind it.”
I hastily made a retort, but apparently Luna was being serious. She flushed her from the fever already red cheeks even more, and slowly unbuttoned her white shirt while breathing bewitchingly. In no time, she took off her top in front of me.
Upon that, her voluminous fruits, freed from their containment, innocently bounced around like they had increased in size, and the light pink buds at the peek of her breasts showed themselves.
A- Apparently she wasn’t wearing a bra. The peeks of her breasts, the pink extensions swelled out like a tree bud and while I was inadvertently about to stare there, Luna leaned over towards me while letting her breasts bounce up and down, and leaked a sweet voice with her even redder cheeks.
“Please be gentle, Shinobu-san…”
J- Just what do you want Shinobu-san to do? The high fever probably had slowed down her thoughts, but did she even forget that she wasn’t wearing a bra? Please don’t say such misleading things to me while looking like that.
Was what I thought, but I had not even once responded to Luna’s requests today. I should at least listen to one request of hers.
Making my resolve, I shifted my gaze, whereupon Elni showed a bright grin with no regards to my feelings. In return, I wordlessly took the towel from her and swiftly got behind Luna’s back.
There Luna raised one arm and started to tie up her golden hair, to make it easier for me to wipe it. As a result, her smooth white back entered my vision and I was about to become agitated by the skin’s delicacy, so I averted my eyes, only to look into the stand mirror in the room.
Perfectly reflected in this mirror was Luna, who defencelessly exposed her black panties on top of the bed and took a bewitching pose by raising both of her slender and graceful arms.
…To be honest, I was captivated. Even while wiping her back, my

gaze was drawn to the mirror, captivating not only my soul, but also my eyes.
“Ahh… Hahn… Mm…”
Luna’s voluminous breasts showed all kind of shapes every time she moved her body along with longing moans. When she once shivered embarrassed, her breasts jumped up like showing off their flexibility, then bewitchingly shook to the sides.
Probably due to that, I felt surprisingly strained when I finished wiping Luna’s back and while I kept taking deep breath in my heart, Elni, who had assumed a silent observer role so far, showed a smile and at the same made yet another unbelievable remark for whatever was going on in her head.
“Hey Shinobu, there’s a bit of sweat between Luna’s breasts, you know? Why don’t you wipe there too?”
“…Any more screwing around like that and I’ll pinch your cheeks later.”
“In- Instead of my cheeks, make do with Luna’s breasts. If it gets out of hand, I’ll stop you, so rest assured. Besides, Luna herself wants you to wipe it. Right, Luna?”
“Ah, yes, you are right. It is a bit cold, so I hope you could do it quickly.”
Her consciousness must have been still hazy from the fever. Luna affirmed with a somewhat drowsy voice, urging me sweetly with “Shinobu-san”.
…Okay, she was cold, so I had to do it, right? It wasn’t good to push a patient. I braced my partly fragmented reasoning, but careful not to forget myself and slowly reached out my hands over her shoulders. Timidly, I touched her soft breasts.
Instantly the sensation of her round breasts spread of my fingertips even through the towel, and on top of that, Luna shivered her body while making a “…Ahn” moan, which shot up my heart beat in no time. But I somewhat composed kept moving my fingers like careful caressing.
“Yah… Somehow, this is… Uhn… amazing…”
Leaking an unforeseen bewitching voice, Luna repeatedly twisted her body, so sometimes my palms softly brushed over her fluffy breasts and while that happened over and over again, my fingertip unmeant touched the peek of her breasts, the pink buds gently like a

peck.
An unbelievable sweet sensation spread on my fingertip. When I lightly rolled over the pinnacle with my fingertip on a sudden impulse,
“Yaahhn… Hah… Ahn…”
Bending her back, Luna let a bewitching soprano voice resound, whereas on the other hand I, returning to my senses, broke out a cold sweat and at the same time swallowed down my saliva with a gulp.
…Now I have done it. Due to my great agitation, I dropped the towel and hastily pulled my hand back in a straight line towards me rapidly beating chest.
But between my hand and my own chest was Luna. What I felt all over my palms were an indescribable softness and flexibility. When I doubtfully confirmed it in the stand mirror, my hand had settled right into… between Luna’s breasts of all places.
I could do nothing but turn pale. Of course such an accident happens when I pulled my hand back in a straight line. With my head full of guilt and panic, I froze up completely, whereupon Elni, who had watched over me, placed her hand against her chin and gave the third ridiculous demand.
“Shinobu, good timing. Wipe the sweat of her breasts with her palm like that. I think that’ll be more pleasant than with a towel. Luna, help him.”
“Ehm… Like this?”
Regardless of my outrageous act, Luna showed no sign of anger at all. Not just that, she held her own breasts from the left and right, raising them up like Elni told her. Along with a bewitching moan, she gently enveloped my hand with her warm breasts.
Her voluminous snow-white breasts. Every time Luna slowly shook them, their sweet softness and enormous elasticity were directly transferred into my hand. Also, as the sweat between her breasts acted like a lubrication oil, the movements of her white breasts was smooth and extremely seductive.
Letting her breasts bounce alternatively, she softly rubbed over my hand, pinched it from the left and right and for whatever reason, Luna extended her pink tongue with a drowsy expression. Next she used her wet tongue to lick the tip of my fingers while my hand was still wrapped between her breasts.

“*kiss*… Mm… *kiss*, *kiss*…”
Pressing her well-formed lips onto my fingertips, she lovely took it into her mouth and wrapped her warm tongue around it like that. Moreover resuming the movements of her breasts, Luna pulled away her lips from my fingers and pleaded.
“Hah, Hah… Shinobu-san… Mm… Please move as well…”
“O- Okay, then I’ll go ahea— wait, no! Don’t get ridiculous too! This should suffice, right? Sorry, but we’re done here.”
Replying so with a somewhat shrill voice, I tried to pull my arm away from Luna’s breasts right away, but
“Ahn… You are so wild… Yah… on my breasts…”
Leaking a rather seductive voice, Luna started to bend her slender waist wriggling back and forth and when I suddenly dropped my gaze, there were the peeks of her ripe breasts. The pink buds became stiff very fast, like they were waiting to be pecked.
…I was at my limit in various ways. While my reasoning was crunching, Elni took one step forward, as she sensed it, whereupon suddenly a bright melody resounded in the room. Luna’s cell phone on the desk was ringing and signalizing a call to us.
Elni picked up that cell phone and held it out to Luna, whereupon I could finally escape from her sweet breasts thanks to that. Luna separated from me a bit regretful and took the cell phone from Elni, answering the call.
“…Yes, Luna here. What is the matter, Boss?”
Boss? A call from her job? Luna was working a part-time job at a family restaurant for a little while now to save up money, so that she could go to university and learn more about society, but
“Eh? Is that so? Actually I have a cold today…”
Something might have happened. While Elni softly hang the white shirt over Luna’s shoulders, Luna clouded her expression as the conversation progressed. And after listening for a while, Luna said “I will ask” and removed the cell phone from her ear, looking at me.
“Shinobu-san, the Boss of my part-time job just told me that a staff member, who had a shift in the noon, is down with a cold. Now they are troubled, since they are short on hands.”
“Guess the restaurant is in a pinch.”
“Yes, so my Boss said ‘I want the boy’s body as your replacement, Luna-chan. He only needs to wash the dishes, carry stuff around or

spent the night with me. Please get him to help us out.'…"

"Guess I'm in a pinch."
I had once met Luna's Boss. But in contrast to her cool appearance that made you fall for her, she was a deplorable beauty, who was called "Perverted Boss" at the restaurant Luna worked at.

I got a bit excited when Luna repeated it, but the Boss' sentences were filled with unsettling words like "want his body" or "spent the night". To be honest, I was greatly worried.
However, the restaurant was always taking care of Luna. I ought to help them when they're troubled. After a short hesitation, I told her that I would help out, whereupon Luna showed a smile with "Thank you" and now shifted her gaze towards Elni.
"Elni-chan, actually they want another helper besides Shinobu-san…"
"This calls for my services! Serving customers is my speciality! I'll show you my level 100 charm!"
"…I hope your level 3 intelligence won't get exposed, though."
With that I interjected a little joke, but Elni replied with a V-sign unbothered.
"The idiot will have it's special spirit, love, charm and hoodie, so it'll be fine! More importantly, let's hurry, Shinobu! We two are going to save the restaurant from it's pinch! You have forty seconds to—"
"That's not enough to get ready, get it?"
Retorting by coating her words, I slowly stood up.
I had only ever served customers in a café at the culture festival, but I should be able to help out with washing the dishes and carrying stuff. Leaving the nursing of Luna to Machina and Nazuna, Elni and I quickly left for Luna's workplace…

…I didn't sign up for this, seriously.
The restaurant was crowded with families and couples. A cheerful atmosphere spread inside, where the customers ate or happily chit-chatted and the waitresses acted gracious with a smile although they were busy.
By the way, one of the waitress was Elni wearing the restaurant's uniform.
A pure-white blouse. A nameplate with "Elni" written on it at her chest. A tight skirt with pink suspenders. All these cutely drew out Elni's charm and her soft snow-white thighs that extended out of the short skirt were fascinating too.
She was not in the least inferior to the other waitresses with their high-class figures. On the contrary, Elni served the customers with her outstanding charm on level 100 and while I might play favouritism, she was more radiant than anyone else in the restaurant.

But what about me then? As I was nervous, I could only make an awkward smile for a while now. Facing the mirror in the hall, I made a small sigh in my heart.
After leaving the house back then, I came to the restaurant together with Elni to live up to the Boss' request, but… to repeat myself, I didn't sign up for this.
The Boss welcomed us with a sexy smile. Getting a lecture from her about the job, we changed into the received uniforms, then I separated from Elni, who headed to the hall to serve the customers, and engrossed myself in washing the dishes in the kitchen. So far, so good.
The problem came after that. They apparently were really short on hands, so the Boss asked me to go out in the hall now and I refused to, since it would be impossible to serve customers with my scary face, but
"You'll be fine, boy. Your aura is a bit different from before now, cute and fascinating. Incidentally, if you refuse to go out into the hall, you'll clean up the storage room all alone with me. And I have no intention to keep myself in check. Giving in to the overflowing passion in my chest, I'll take you—"
"Disappear in two seconds flat, you pervert… Hey, wait! Why're you setting your hands on my clothes?"
"It's your fault for teasing me with such cold words. It really made me lose my self-control. Properly take responsibility now. I believe you're obligated to, boy."
"Unfortunately, I'm at an age where I insist on my rights, but don't care about obligations. Farewell, Perverted Boss. I'll go work in the hall."
The Boss approached me while bewitchingly licking over her lips. Sensing a bit of danger, I headed to the hall to escape her, but to my shame, I didn't know how to take orders and could only do simple jobs while smiling awkwardly.
But I should learn from Elni and do everything I can right now. I took a deep breath. Renewing my spirit, I focused on my duties, whereupon the waitresses gave me tasks one after another, as they weren't scared of my frightening looks.
"Nanjou-san, please bring some fresh water to table 2." "The cool and handsome Shinobu-san of Luna-san's dreams, please clean up

table 5.” “Nanjou-chan, I’m tired. Heal me by giving me a gentle hug.” “And a passionate kiss for me.”
“…I only got one body. I’ll do it one after another, so wait. And you last two, don’t tease your juniors.”
Temporarily stopping my words, I jokingly added “I might take you serious”. I had gotten the composure to do that and while ignoring the girls, who raised a shrill shriek for some reason, I diligently worked on my job, in no way inferior to Elni. Amidst that, the Boss, whensoever she showed up, attractively snuggled up to me and for some reason petted my cheek with a long breath.
“Thanks for working in the hall, boy. I’ll help out here now too, so leave all the troublesome stuff to me. For now, just stay away from table 3, okay?”
“…You stay away from me as much as possible too, okay?”
I replied jokingly while forgetting my respectful speech and directed my eyes at the table 3 in question, whereupon there sat ill-bred looking guys. They were making a ruckus by laughing neighing with loud voices and the nearby customers knitted their eyebrows annoyed.
…What burdensome customers. As she wanted to give them a warning, the Boss headed gallantly for table 3, but Elni made her move faster.
As she had been near the table, Elni, unimpressed by their ill-bred nature, started to attend to them without time for the Boss to stop her.
“Hello! Have you decided on your order? If not, I recommend the Salisbury steak set. When I snatched a bite earlier, it was really good!”
“Eh? Snatched a bite? That’s a funny joke. You’re quite cute. Why don’t you sit down? We would like to talk about a lot of things with you.”
“Fufu, a lame pick-up line like that won’t work on me. Your technique’s still lacking. You’ve to improve your manliness a bit more before you can score with a mature girl like me.”
Look who’s talking. Mature girl? Where? Or rather, what happened to the respective speech, Elni? Also, when did you snatch a bite?
While I showed a wry smile, Elni continued her service with her unchanged smile.

No matter how bad the guys' attitude got, no matter how often they persistently repeated their pick-up lines, she never showed an annoyed expression. On the contrary, she cracked another joke and genial eased the atmosphere… Bit by bit, the malice vanished from the expression of the guys. In time they stopped messing around too and started to stare at Elni with somewhat flushed cheeks and a smile.

“Okay, I’ll pass on your order. Please wait a while. Also, don’t make too much ruckus in the restaurant, okay? It bothers the other customers. Listen, if you want to make a ruckus— then only during your coming-of-age or graduation ceremony!”

No, using the coming-of-age ceremony as an example was a bit imprudent and while it maybe was okay for an entrance ceremony, I

was doubtful it would wise to make a ruckus at the graduation ceremony. Or would you shout “Encore!” at the closing address? It would make you forget about your farewell tears.
No such retorts left the guys’ mouths and all together with still red cheeks, they absent-minded watched after Elni leaving, looking somewhat happy.
Elni really could get along with anyone right away. Noticing that once again, I looked at her fondly. But on the other hand, the Boss completely had lost her chance to appear,
“…Wow. This feels like a neglect play. Not bad.”
She looked not all that unhappy about it, so I thought about pleasing her some more and neglected her. I put the water on my silver tray and went over to table 1, where I came across two familiar girls by coincidence.
Sharp and finely chiselled features and a straight back. A cool beauty with a dignified aura. She was quite popular at school and—my precious friend, Gogyou Hijiri.
The other girl with the breathtaking appearance was Kaorun aka Gogyou Kaoru. She was Hijiri’s older sister, a perverted maid and surprisingly shy. On a rare occasion, she wore casual clothes and her balanced proportion gave off an elegant charm.
But I never expected to run into these two here…
When I headed over to them a bit surprised, they seemed to notice me as well and Hijiri widened her eyes a bit, then faintly flushed her cheeks into a light red.
“It’s Shinobu-kun…”
“—An unforeseen encounter with him. I could not calm down my racing heart. My beloved Shinobu-kun. Wearing a waiter uniform makes him appear somewhat mature and I am inadvertently captivated by his cool behaviour. But the smile he gives me seems so innocent, his expression makes… my chest all hot.”
“…Uhm, Kaoru-san? What’re you talking about so suddenly? It’s embarrassing, so please stop it.”
“Aww, if possible I would like to hug and kiss Shinobu-kun right now. I want to take him home with me and spoil him with petting. Would he be happy if I allow him to lay on my lap?”
“K- Kaoru-san! Seriously, stop it! Please don’t read my mind!”
Hijiri turned bright red very fast. Kaorun smiled faintly. Observing

their intimate exchange, I asked a question with a casual tone.
“Hey, do you often come here?”
“Ehm, I only came here sometimes, but Luna-san works here, right? So Kaoru-san eagerly comes here to meet Luna-san. Today I’m here because Kaoru-san invited me.”
“H- Hijiri-chan, you make it sound like I am a fan of Luna-san. Please refrain from stating any misleading things. To begin with, I am not frequenting this place that often. Only around four times a week.”
“That makes you a regular here already.”
Smiling, I pointed that out, whereupon now Kaorun turned red and quickly changed the topic with “B- By the way,” to brush it off.
“What are you doing here, Shinobu-sama? Are you cosplaying? If so, you are bothering the restaurant, you know? You are a ‘bad boy’, Shinobu-chan.”
“…Huh? You want me to say ‘I’m sorry, Kaoru-oneechan’ or what? Actually, why didn’t occur to you that I work here?”
Giving a light retort, I shrugged my shoulders and explained.
That Luna was bedridden with a cold since the morning. That Elni and I helped out in the restaurant in her stead. That I first washed the dishes, but now was kind of forcefully dragged out into the hall.
When I summarized all the events, both Hijiri and Kaorun knitted their eyebrows, as they were worried about Luna, and I made a wry smile to change the atmosphere.
“Still, it’s impressive that the Boss let me out in the hall. I mean, I make people scream in fear just by smiling, right? So serving customers doesn’t really suit me.”
“No, that is not true. Your kindness allows you to interact with anyone without prejudice, Shinobu-sama. You are a wonderful gentleman, who is considerate and capable of attending to others. I believe you can serve customers without any problems, Shinobu-sama.”
“K- Kaorun? Eh? You’re Kaoru-san, right? What’s up with you all of a sudden? I’m a bit scared of your high praises. Let me hear you usual frank impression.”
“—Then allow me to be frank: You serving customers is an absolute scream. I imagine that you would say ‘Here’s a treat from the great me, enjoy!’, then take the fresh water into your mouth to spit it at the customers with attitude. Both the customers and staff would become

ashen-faced."
"…I'll slap you if you're too rude."
"Wh- Why such a reaction? I am not allowed to flatter you! I am not allowed to be rude either! Then just what do you want me to say!"
"You did just fine, you little rascal."
When I rustled Kaorun's head half for fun, Hijiri softly interjected after seeing our silly jokes.
"Kaoru-san's joke aside, I think you'll do a fine job now, Shinobu-kun. I get the feeling you changed a bit lately. Your aura has become softer, hasn't it?"
"The wild me has turned mild?"
To be honest, I couldn't tell myself. Not having a clue, I mentally tilted my head, whereupon Kaorun nodded and opened her mouth, surprisingly agreeing with Hijiri.
"From my point on as well, I think that you have changed a bit, Shinobu-sama. You are more wonderful than before, really charming. And on this occasion, please let me take a picture of your waiter outfit."
While saying so, Kaorun suddenly pulled out a digital camera out of her pocket and took pictures of me.
I unconsciously made a Joj*-Stance from the current mood, whereupon I suddenly saw Elni in the corner of my vision. Who knows since when she was watching?
She was showing a roguish smile and sneaked up to Kaorun from behind, as she wanted to do something. In regards, Kaorun didn't seem to notice Elni's approach, even though she was sensitive to people's presence, and looked satisfied down on the digital camera in her hands.
"Fufu, Shinobu-sama in a waiter outfit. I can boast with this to the others. I am sure it will sell for a good pric— eh, meeow!"
Midway in her sentence, Kaorun raised an adorable shriek. Most likely because Elni kissed her ear from behind. Kaorun turned around flustered on a rare occasion, whereas Elni softly warned her.
"Kaorun, no photo-shooting in the restaurant. The staff will throw you out, you know?"
"W- Well, what can I say. You have my apologies. But please tell me that normally. You really surprised me. Why would you kiss my ear?"
"My way of showing affection. And I'll keep quiet about the photos to

the staff… but you sure are always carrying your camera with you, huh. You love it that much?”
“Well, it is like a hobby for me. Memories can easily fade, right? But when you preserve them in picture like this, you can always recall the faded memories.”
After preciously caressing her camera, Kaorun grinned for some reason.
“—But that was just a lie. Actually I am just making money off the pictures.”
“I see… You really love everyone, Kaorun. You treasure the memories with everyone, so you take picture like that to not forget them.”
“E- Elni-san? Were you listening to me? I told you was a lie. Certainly, I am taking a lot of pictures. However only because I believe everyone’s fantastic pictures will sell for a high price, since they are so cute…”
“Sorry, Kaorun.”
“For making you embarrassed” would probably the continuation of these words. Even while gently petting Kaorun’s head, Elni let a sadness shine through, but that expression changed in no time and her usual smile was directed at me.
“Shinobu, I’m taking my break now, but don’t dwell on talking.”
“Yeah, sorry. I’ll get back to work right away.”
Hiding my faint wonderment, I nodded, whereupon Elni recommended “The Salisbury steak set is good!” to Hijir and Kaorun, and turned on her heels, leaving while mumbling something like “… Pictures… Memories…” with a small voice. On the other hand, Hijiri and I watched after Elni’s back, then each shifted our gaze towards the blushing Kaorun.
“Fufu, Elni sees right through you when you hide your embarrassment, Kaoru-san.”
“And you screamed a ‘meow’, since you didn’t notice Elni, right?”
“B- Both of you be quiet. There is nothing I can do against Elni-san. How can I say it, Elni-san has not the slightest fragment of malice or spite.”
Averting her eyes from us, Kaorun explained with still red cheeks.
“It is quite difficult to perceive the presence of someone so lovely and innocent. Besides, Elni-san is… wait, why are you both petting

my head? Stop grinning! Please leave me alone now!”
Kaorun had turned bright red up to her ears. It was quite cute. I kept petting her head like that, but I had to return to my job now. I regretfully said my good-bye to Hijiri and Kaorun and resumed servicing the customers…

Watching off Hijiri and Kaorun, who left the restaurant after finishing their meal, I still kept making an effort at my job, whereas Elni came back from her break. After the ill-bred gang, she now got along with a family with child and was smiled at with “Elni-oneechan” by the little child.
And, like Hijiri and Kaorun had said, I myself might have really changed a bit.
I still couldn’t tell myself, but I didn’t scare anyone during my job and when I devoted myself to the serving of costumers even after my break, the evening sun shone into the restaurant at some point.
…Already this late, huh.
The evening sun heralding the end of the shift. Warm words of Good Job. While I got the changing over with in the changing room after my shift, I was still in a bit of high spirits. Servicing customers wasn’t all too bad.
I stopped my cheeks from unconsciously forming a smile and headed for the office, whereupon I could hear a conversation from behind the slightly opened door. It must be Elni and the Boss.
“Hey Elni-chan, I’m repeating myself, but I’m really interested in you. I want to work together with you so bad. Won’t you work part-time here?”
“…Dun wanna work.”
Elni cracked a joke like a failure of a human. In regards, the Boss stuck to her guns and filled her tone with passion.
“Why not? How about 1000 yen per hour? If you like, I can even add a meal, a nap and a hug and kiss from me? You might as well become a full-time staff member.”
“May I snatch bites?”
“Just do whatever you want!”
“Yay! Nice! Then from tomorrow onwards… wait, no.”
Elni cleared her throat with a cough, then changed her tone into a serious one.
“I’m really appreciate the offer. I was just thinking about saving up

some money. But I can't keep working for a long period."
"Ehm, in other words, you want a short-term contract? Then I can refer you to one."
"…Really?"
"Yes, it's too bad you won't work here, but you and the boy helped us out today, so it's my way of thanking you."
Apparently clearly giving up on employing Elni, the Boss continued softly.
"Actually I have a friend working at nursery school, but one of their teachers is on maternity leave and a cold seems to go around between the others, so they want a helper."
"I see. A part-time job at a nursery school."
"I'm sure dealing with children will be though, but what do you say, Elni-chan? Want to try it?"
"Of course! I love kids! I want to play with them!"
Elni replied full of energy, whereupon the Boss suddenly opened her mouth roguish.
"But Elni-chan, when you want to save up money at this time of the year… it means you want to buy a Christmas present for a certain someone?"
"Yeah, that too, but I hate the cold, so I'm going on a trip to a bit warmer place. I'm going to work to save up for the expenses."
Mixed in Elni's bright voice was a faint loneliness.
…Pretty much like I had woken up from a dream. My earlier high spirit vanished in no time and I was once again reminded. After Christmas… I would probably never see Elni again. Not becoming our family, she would leave this city all by herself.
Even now I couldn't find words to stop her…

The salary envelope in both our hands. It was the payment from the Boss. Both Elni and I stuffed it into our pockets and left the family restaurant behind us, then slowly advanced towards the shopping district under the dawning sky…
We were going to buy ingredients for dinner now. In place of the sick Luna, Elni was apparently going to make dinner too, so we two stepped into the shopping district, whereupon a woman in the flush of youth, maybe a waitress?, called out to us in front of a café.
"Oh, Elni-chan. Why don't you have some tea with your friend here? We have some delicious cake, you know? But you, Elni-chan, have

to pay in advance.”
“I, I’m not doing eat-and-runs! How rude!”
Even while puffing up her cheeks a bit, Elni playfully clung to her, whereupon the woman giggled, flushed her cheeks a bit and changed the topic.
“Anyway, last time you came here with a foreigner, didn’t you? You know, that wonderful man with the red hair. Is he… well, still single?”
“Mh? Do you mean Bram? Well he’s technically single, but he’s devoted to his wife, so dating him will prove to be a bit difficult.”
“…I hate life! Alcohol! I can’t stay sober now!”
As her love failed, the woman sulked.
Well, that aside. “Bram” was the name of Luna and Machina’s father. A while ago he came to the human world to check upon Machina, but did he go to the café with Elni during his stay? Or did he drop by here again?
A bit interested, I thought about asking Elni about it, but
“Yo, Elni-chan. We got some fresh Japanese butterfish today. I’ll give you a discount. What do you say?” “Ah, Elni-chan, want some Taiyaki today again?” “Uwah, Elni-san is together with a guy. Is he your boyfriend?”
Like that, the shopkeepers or passengers smiled at her, whereas Elni replied to them with a smile and enjoyed a conversation, while there was no space for me to come in, even though I stood right next to her.
…Elni could get along with anyone. She could be with anyone. Surely anyone would come to like her. Even without us by her side, she had many people around her, who gave her a smile like this.
I was sure Elni would smile wherever she was. Even if she was to leave this city, she might make new friends right away and smile together with them. Even without us…
While such thoughts crossed my mind during the shopping, I couldn’t bear it anymore at some point and I stopped midway on our way home. Elni, walking in front of me, didn’t notice it.
Her back slowly got further away. While I was hesitant to even call her to a halt for some reason, Elni looked left and right all of a sudden and turned around… With her red eyes filled with worry, she hastily came running over to me, even though the distance wasn’t all that great.

“Sorry, Shinobu. I was thinking about dinner, so I didn’t notice. Sp, what’s up? Do you feel sick?”
“…That’s not it.”
Elni showed a worried expression. After a short hesitation, I clenched my fist and began to talk.
“I heard your talk with the Boss earlier. I’m sorry for eavesdropping, but you really intend to leave his city?”
Elni only nodded quietly to my question.
“Why? Why can’t you stay with us forever? You say you like being alone, but that’s a lie, isn’t it?”
“…You know, I like seeing everyone’s smile.”
Looking up the mild red sun, Elni calmly spun her words.
“When I’m alone, I’m often reminded that I’ll remember everyone I met forever. Sometimes I get worried and recall everyone in my head… I don’t want to recall crying faces then.”
That surely was…
“Shedding tears on a parting is all fine. But, for the last expression to be a crying face… that’s too much for me. I like smiling faces. I never want to see crying faces. So I’m leaving this city. I can’t become your family, Shinobu.”
…It was probably the first time I heard her true feelings. But not knowing the meaning behind her words, I was confused, whereas Elni showed a soft smile.
“You guys will be fine even without me. Even the I’m a Goddess, I can only make others laugh. You’ll find a replacement for me right away. You can even forget about me.”
“…You’re an idiot like always.”
No, I must be the idiot.
“There’s no replacement for you. I don’t even want a replacement for you. Family can’t be replaced, can it?”
The smile Elni squeezed out was different from usual. It looked like it could change into a crying face at any moment, and every time I spoke out my trembling words, my feelings became more concrete.
“You know, I was always hesitant. I was when you tried to leave before and I was even now. I was having stupid thoughts like you have your own life and it would be selfish of me to stop you.”
Looking straight at Elni, I adjusted my cracked voice with “But”.
“I can’t give you up after all. I’m sure you’ll be just fine anywhere,

because you can befriend anyone. But you know, I'm different. A life without you is unthinkable for me."
Not hesitating, I slowly reached out my hand.
"Stay with us forever, Elni."
Firmly telling her my feelings, I gently took her hand, whereupon she knitted her eyebrows troubled.
"…Sorry, Shinobu."
To hide her expression, she averted her eyes from me and looked down.
"I probably wanted to rely on your kindness one last time. But this is my own selfishness. I'll go on a trip… I shouldn't have told you about it…"
With a voice filled with regret, Elni spoke quietly. But she squeezed back my hand. I got the feeling that her feelings were conveyed through her warm palm. Therefore I wanted to keep holding onto the small warmth of this hand forever.
Elni and my palms tightly squeezed together. Elni's sentiments were surely still with us. Because during our way home, Elni never let go off my hand…

Chapter 02
The Flower that Bloomed in the Rain

—Stop raining.
Looking up to the rainy sky through the window, the little girl mumbled quietly in the broad room without any warmth.
The little girl had received cheers from the villagers. She no longer could play with her friends like before. The villagers worshipped the little girl, made her wear pretty clothes and gave her a gaudy residence.
But hardly anyone came near her residence, so it was a partly shut off world of solitude. The one and only place, where she was allowed to belong. Unable to go back to her real home, the little girl didn't show any tears despite that and kept granted the wishes of the villagers.
When she felt sad all by herself, the little girl watched the children through the window. The children, who were allowed to play around innocently. Her friends. Even if she couldn't join them, the little girl really liked to see their smiles.
Therefore she hated rainy days, where the children didn't come outside. She kept hating them and even after she broke out of this shut off world at some point in time, the little girl eventually kept crying all by herself on rainy days even now…

♥♥!

Since when was Elni considering to leave our house?
I can't become your family, Shinobu. Someone like me can't become Machina's older sister. I won't come back to a place that I once left — Many of Elni's words crossed my mind.
I was sure it was different from Hijiri, Kaorun or Machina's case.
When Kaorun tried to leave Hijiri, when Hijiri tried to take her distance from me and when Machina tried to go back to the demon realm, in either case the girls had hesitation themselves. And I was able to sense that. However, I couldn't really sense it with Elni.

She might have planned to leave us from the very beginning.
It was nonchalant early afternoon on a holiday. I came to Machina and Elni's shared room to check upon them. Machina sat happily on the bed together with me and eagerly talk to me with a fashion magazine in one hand. On the other hand, Elni wore her usual expression and built a plastic model on the table, showing triumphantly showed off the finished model to Machina.
"Look, Machina! Isn't it done cool? I'll give it to you!"
"Eh? I don't really want it. Anyway, come talk to Shinobu too."
Machina easily ignored the plastic model, whereas Elni puckered her lips and replied dissatisfied.
"Shinobu this, Shinobu that. My model is really well made, you know? You really don't want it?"
"I mean, you already forced— cough, gave me various plastic models. I don't have enough space for it. If you want to boast with them, why don't you set them up at the front door?"
"…I'm not giving it to you when you want it afterwards."
As she wanted to present it to Machina, Elni mumbled "I'll ask Tomoe-san, so that I can put them up at the front door" somewhat sulking and also a bit regretful.
However, on a closer look, the room had quite a lot plastic models for a girl's room. The models took all kinds of poses. Did Elni make all of them?
While such thoughts crossed my mind, I casually shifted my gaze back, whereupon Elni excitedly took out the game console and now Machina puckered her lips a bit upon seeing that.
"Elni, you can play that game anytime. But Shinobu came all the way here to play with us. Don't you want to talk with him?"
"I'm happy with just having him here. So it's fine. Besides, I'm burning for some gaming right now! I'll become a master monster hunter! Then boast about it to the kids!"
"A master monster hunter? Boast to the kids? What the?"
Machina titled her head doubtfully, whereupon Elni put the game console aside for a moment and explained with her arms crossed.
"I believe I already told you, Machina, but I'm working part-time at a nursery school these days."
"Reminds me, you said 'I graduated from being the personal guard!'. I think my sister's Boss referred it to you…"

“Yeah, right. But there’s another girl besides me working part-time at the nursery school. Her name is Minami. She seems to be your classmate, Shinobu, Machina.”
“…Minami is working part-time at the nursery school?”
Minami Ouka. Having huge breasts that were rumoured to be F-Cups, she was a slightly erotic girl with adorable features and my childhood friend. But I never knew that she worked at a nursery school. When I interjected a bit surprised, Elni nodded with a serious expression for some reason.
“All the kids call her ‘Minami-sensei’ and love her. In contrast, I’m simply called ‘Elni’ by the kids and there’s even a mean boy that says ‘Hey Elni, you have forty seconds to buy me some fried noodle bread’.”
“Could it be, they’re taking you for an idiot?”
“Or rather, they believe I’m an idiot. Yesterday a kid flipped my skirt and the other boys reacted like this: ‘Hey! What’re you doing! You can’t do that! If anything, do it with Minami-sensei!’…”
“…That’s too sad, I’m at a loss for words.”
“I feel sad too. I want to get along with the boys like Minami too, not just the girls. Therefore I need to become a master monster hunter.”
“Mh? How does a game come into this?”
When I doubtfully interjected again, Elni lightly held out the game console to me and replied.
“As a matter of fact, a hunting game is popular with the boys right now. They once let me join them, but one mean boy told me ‘You suck! I’m not playing with you anymore, Elni! We’re through!’ and got angry.”
Looking sad again, Elni raised a bright voice with “But” and the console in one hand.
“Once I raise my skills in the game, I’m sure I can play happily with the kids. We might get really close. I’m good at RPGs, but not with action games, so I’m training now. Shinobu, watch me grow from over there.”
“I can help you, if you want?”
While saying so, I leaned forward, whereupon Machina pulled on my sleeve for some reason.
“Ehm, what’s up, Machina? Do you want to play the game too?”
“N- No. You’re only caring about Elni. Weren’t you reading a fashion

magazine with me right now? I guess you aren't interested in these?"
"To be honest, I don't know much about girl's clothes, but… I think these clothes would look good on you."
"Really? Actually, I liked them too. You have a good eye."
When I pointed to a page of the magazine with a crease, Machina animated her voice with "What about these clothes? Do you like this kind, Shinobu?", as her mood was fixed right away.
But even while I listened to her, I unconsciously snuck a peek at Elni.
Elni was engrossed in her game. She wouldn't change. What would I have to do to stop her? …Such thoughts crossed my mind and at some point, I kept coming up only with reluctant answers. Due to that, Machina peered into my face a bit worried.
"What's the matter, Shinobu? You're so absent-minded for a while now. And you're making such a serious face."
"W- Woman fall for this face."
"…You stammered a bit just now. Why're you trying to brush it off? Are you worrying about something? If you like, I can hear you out."
Apparently I couldn't flinch from it anymore. I certainly was worrying about Elni. But, was it alright to reveal that Machina, to the others?
—For the last expression to be a crying face… that's too much for me.
Suddenly Elni's words floated in the back of my head. When I slowly shifted my gaze, Elni stopped playing her game and looked at me straight while putting on a somewhat sad smile.
What would happen… if I were to speak about everything? Elni might disappear then without waiting for Christmas, so that she wouldn't have to see everyone's saddened expression.
Befallen with that worry, I was stuck for words, whereas Machina alternative looked at Elni and me, then puffed up her cheeks a bit for some reason.
"Shinobu, why're you only looking at Elni? Are you two hiding something?"
"No, we're not hiding anything…" I lied so right away, but not believing it, Machina leaned over her body further and brought her face closer.
Upon that, her long eyelashes and glamorous lips were really close and furthermore, her sweet fragrance tickled my nasal cavities, so my heartbeat accelerated regardless of the inappropriate situation.

At that time, I could hear the faint DING DONG of the front door's intercom.
"M- Machina, someone's at the door."
"Right. But my sister will get it. Anyway Shinobu, why're you averting your eyes? If it's not something you feel guilty about, look into my eyes and tell me."
"O- Okay, I just have to look you into the eyes, right?" with that I looked into Machina's amber eyes as prompted to, whereupon Elni, who had stayed quiet so far, faintly flushed her cheeks and commented.
"Somehow, it feels like you're going to kiss."
"H- Hey, Elni! That's not what I got close to Shinobu for! Don't get any weird ideas! I was just worried about him…"
Shaking both her hands, Machina denied, whereas suddenly a small knock resounded and following, Luna showed up in the room. She seemingly fully recovered from the cold she had the other day and opened her mouth with a smile.
"Ehm, Hijiri-san and Kaoru-san came over to play just now… But why are you three all red?"
Luna tilted her head midway in her sentence, whereas Machina pointed at me with still red cheeks and replied.
"Listen to this, Sister. Shinobu seems to be hiding something, but he won't tell me what. Elni even covered for him by making a weird joke. The two of them might be plotting something."
"Is that so, Shinobu-san?"
"Ehm, well, what can I say…"
When I was stuck for words again, Luna mimicked Machina for some reason and got close to me with a smiling face. The sweet fragrance doubled involuntary. Moreover, Luna stared at me, then kissed my ear, as she just wanted to play around unlike Machina.
"…Hey, stop it. Why would you— wait, why're you kissing me as well, Machina! Don't do it if you turn this bright red! Actually, you two just want physical contact, don't you?"
"I am sorry. That is actually true."
"Th- That's not my intent. I thought it would be the most efficient way to make you confess. If you don't tell me, well… I'll kiss you again."
I got the feeling that Machina partly forgot about the initial goal. I leaned back to escape from them, but due to my agitation, I lost my

balance and flopped face-up onto the bed like that. In regards, Luna and Machina looked at me by hanging over me.
In front of my eyes and nose tip were clear emerald green and deep amber eyes. Pink and light red lips. Their voluminous breasts at a hair length. Their sweet fragrance that chipped away at my reasoning.
I had fallen into a pinch in no time. While my face became hot at the same time I panicked, suddenly a shutter sound resounded. When I glanced over, there stood Elni holding a digital camera.
"…What're you doing?"
"Mh? Imitating Kaorun. It'll be a nice keepsake."
The keepsake of being pushed down by two beautiful girls. I wasn't too sure about that.
Replying to my question indifferently, Elni pressed the shutter once again, whereupon both Luna and Machina turned red and I used that chance to escape. I got off the bed, rushed out of the room and down the stairs, whereupon I could hear Luna and Machina's voices with "Please wait, Shinobu-san" and "We're not done with the physical contact yet!" from behind, but I moved to the living room unconcerned.
There were Hijiri and Kaorun sitting on the sofa, as they had come over to play like Luna had said earlier. As soon as Kaorun noticed me, she tilted her head doubtfully.
"What is the matter, Shinobu-sama? You look a bit flustered…?"
"Yeah, I'm being chased by Luna and Machina right now. Can I hide somewhere? I want to wait for their feelings to calm down."
"Your question troubles me a bit, since this is not my house, but I do have an idea."
Kaorun beckoned me with her hand while smiling roguish for some reason. A bit of worry spread in my chest, but urged by Kaorun with "Over here", I crouched down at Hijiri's feet, whereupon
"K- Kaoru-san? What are you— Yahn!"
At the same time Hijiri raised an adorable shriek, my vision fell into light blue panties. Kaorun had flipped Hijiri's long skirt with attitude, only to put her hands onto the back of my head right afterwards. Next she pushed my head into Hijiri's skirt.
"This ain't working, Kaorun! They'll find me! For sure!"
"Uhn… Shinobu-kun, if you rub there… Iyah…"

Leaking a bewitching voice and twisting her body, Hijiri tried to press her thighs together.
However, it ended up pinching my cheeks in-between her smooth thighs.
Upon that, a proper elasticity was transferred from her thighs and I felt fluffy sensation on my nose tip through her panties. A nice sweet-and-sour fragrance. Moreover, every time I took a breath, Hijiri shivered her body with “Mm…”, gradually increasing the pressure of her thighs.

“…This might have been too much for the sensitive Hijiri-chan.”
Before that, it was strange for a hiding place anyway. Retorting to Kaorun in my mind, I tried to get out of Hijiri’s skirt at once, but at the worst timing faint footsteps reached my ears and next I could hear Luna and Machina’s voices.
“Hey Hijiri, Kaoru, have you seen Shinobu?”

“He does not seem to be here… wait, huh? Hijiri-san, your face is somewhat flushed. Is something wrong?”
“It’s… Mm… nothing… Mm… Don’t worry, I’m fine…”
“Really? Like my sister said, your face is really red. Maybe a cold?”
“M- My body… Uh… certainly feels a bit hot… But I’m fine…”
Even while replying to Luna and Machina, Hijiri leaked seductive moans. Moreover, from her thighs I could sense that she was wriggling her body… It might be only a matter of time until I was found.
Even I was about to tremble from the fear of getting found and the guilt towards Hijiri, whereupon Kaorun interjected helping.
“You two, Hijiri-chan is only feeling a bit horny, so you do not need to worry. Anyway, about Shinobu-sama, he was mumbling ‘Why are boobs round?’ earlier, then blurted out ‘I’m going to look for and find the true boobs.’ and rushed out without paying any attention to the confused us.”
“…I don’t think Shinobu would say something like that, but is it true that he left the house?”
“Maids do not lie. I have a lead, so let us have a date while we look for Shinobu-sama. You accompany us as well, Luna-san.”
“Eh? But I have plans with Hijiri-san— wait, Kaoru-san, please do not pull!”
Apparently Kaorun dragged out Machina and Luna. Their voices gradually became more distant, so I slowly peeked out my head from Hijiri’s skirt.
Upon that, Hijiri had dampened her eyes a bit, flushed her cheeks and was breathing roughly. Feeling guilty, I timidly reached out my hand towards her with “Ehm, are you okay?”, but
“S- Stop, Shinobu-kun! Don’t come closer!”
“…I am sorry, Hijiri-san. I was a fool. Please forgive me.”
She must have been angry after all. My extended hand was completely rejected and I inadvertently lapsed into respectful speech all depressed, whereupon Hijiri hastily shook both her hands.
“N- No, Shinobu-kun. I’m not really angry. It’s just that I think I’ll leak a weird voice if you touch me now…”
Weird voice? Like what? A bit interested, I tried touching her ear, whereupon
“IYAHN! HAHN…”

Aw, now I have done it. I had only touched her lightly, yet Hijiri shivered her body by bending backwards as soon as she leaked a bewitching voice and laid down face-up on the sofa, dampening her eyes even more.
“Hah, Hah, Shinobu-kun you meanie. Don’t do it again or I’ll leak an embarrassing voice again.”
…Not good. My prankish nature was awakened. But I somehow managed to stop my extended hand, whereupon there was yet another sudden shutter sound. When I turned around surprised, there stood Elni with a smile like expected.
“This’ll be a great keepsake, Shinobu.”
The keepsake of pushing down a beautiful girl. It made me want to cover my eyes. Returning to my senses, I lowered my head and repeated apologies to Hijiri…

After that, Elni started to talk with a smile while getting under the heated table when Hijiri had calmed down.
“So, Hijiri, why’re you here today?”
“Ah, right. I wanted Luna-san to teach me knitting, but… that’ll have to wait until the three of them are back. Luna-san, Machina-san and Kaoru-san went out together.”
“I see. But why do you suddenly want to knit?”
On Elni’s casual question, Hijiri faintly flushed her cheeks and replied while sneaking a glance at me for some reason.
“Y- You know, it’s Christmas soon.”
“Yeah, it means chicken. The Holy Night of chicken.”
“Ehm, isn’t it more like a night of death for the chicken? And while there’s certainly chicken for dinner, Christmas means giving presents, right? So I want to knit mufflers or gloves for those that have been taken care of me…”
“So that’s the reason. You’re amazing, Hijiri.”
Elni grinned, then suddenly crossed her arms and pondered with “Presents, huh”. Watching her with a side-glance, I continued to chit-chat with Hijiri for a while.
Then Elni pulled out the game console from her pocket, as she was done with her pondering, and started to play again. Hijiri must have been a bit curious, as she reserved peeked at Elni’s hands.
“That looks fun, Elni. What game is that?”
“Fufu, it’s an action game, where you enjoy passionate battle against

monsters.”
Elni replied with a bright tone to answer Hijiri’s question.
According to Elni, in the game the player was a hunter in a fantasy world and could hunt monsters or animals on plateaus, in the desert, on snowy mountains or even in the water. Moreover it had a multiplayer modus, where skilled players good help out other players.
Listening to these game explanations, Hijiri said “Sounds fun” and dropped her gaze onto the game console, whereupon Elni said with a smile and her still bright tone.
“Do you want to try it, Hijiri? I’ll teach you how it’s played.”
“Really? Then I’ll give it a try, but I have rarely been playing any games, so I might be really bad at it. Could you please not laugh at me?”
Hijiri flushed her cheeks, whereas Elni gave an instant “Of course” answer and handed her the game console. Hijiri started playing right away, but she really wasn’t used to games.
“Wah, Uwah. Wh- What do I do, Elni? I can’t get out of the water anymore…”
While holding the game console, the flustered Hijiri kept moving her hands restlessly left, right, up and down. Her behaviour was just so cute that both Elni and I couldn’t suppress a small outburst of laughter.
Hijiri instantly turned bright red on our reactions and looked down embarrassed.
“D- Don’t laugh, you two. I said I wasn’t good with it.”
“…My bad. I’m sorry, Hijiri. But it’s an interesting game, albeit a bit difficult, isn’t it?”
“Yeah. It’s really fun. So I can play with it for a bit longer, Elni?”
“Don’t be so reserved and play all you want. I’ll tell you a trick now that will let you enjoy the game some more. Listen, Hijiri, this monster is…”
Surely she was happy that Hijiri showed an interest in the game she liked herself.
While giving advices to Hijiri, Elni smiled really pleased. That expression bloomed like a large-petalled flower, smiling really vivid.
So… So I wanted to see that smiling face forever. I wanted to please her more, make her wear this smile.

But I still hadn't found a way to stop Elni. At the same time I pain suddenly ran through my chest, an impatience spread. But I put on a smile like I didn't notice it and watched over Elni and Hijiri for a while, then I left my seat, telling them I was going to the toilet.
…If I were to make a gloomy face, Machina might get suspicious of me again.
Glancing at the mirror, I washed my face and left the bathroom with renewed feelings. Speak of the devil and she shows up. The front door opened in that very moment and everyone came back. Luna, Machina, Kaorun and even my mother. Most likely my mother met the others midway.
For now I called out to them with "Welcome home", but for some reason, Luna and Machina wordlessly embraced me and gentle stroked my back in sequence, then disappeared into the living room together.
Just what was that? I doubtfully threw my glance at Kaorun.
"Did you say something to these two?"
"Yes. The two seemed concerned about your worries, so I told them: 'Shinobu-sama seems to have awoken to cross-dressing from the repeated experiences. But he is confused about himself, since he feels pleasure from cross-dressing, and surely is worried about that.'."
"…Don't tell me, Luna and Machina accepted that?"
"Yes, through my eloquence. Now they will not question you any further, I believe. Good for you, is it not, Shinobu-sama? Well, you do not need to thank me…"
"I'm troubled how I can't thank you honestly. Even if you were deceiving them for me, couldn't you have found a better way? How am I going to face these two from now on?"
"I believe you should just act like always. Once your worries are solved, you can laugh it off as a joke. And, Shinobu-sama—"
Midway in her sentence, Kaorun tightly embraced me and kept stroking my back gently just like Luna and Machina had done.
"Should you be unable to resolve your worries by yourself, please rely on me. I will always lend a hand. While I am Hijri-chan's maid, I like to think of myself as your maid as well, Shinobu-sama."
"You're already cute enough… yet you get even cuter sometimes. That's not fair."

I couldn't utter the least complaint. When I petted her head out of gratitude, Kaorun turned red and got away from me right away, heading to the living room in an escape. On the other hand, my mother, who had watched silently, looked at me and smirked teasingly.
"Lately, you're starting to look more and more like your father."
"Don't group me together with that gigolo. If anything, I want to resemble you."
"You surprisingly have a mother complex, huh."
While saying so, my mother softened her expression and adjusted her tone a bit.
"So, it seems you're worrying about something, but how's it going? Think you can manage?"
"…I'm afraid I haven't come up with an answer yet."
I replied with a sigh, whereupon my mother lightly shrugged her shoulders and replied.
"Even if you're looking for it, answers aren't something so easily found."
"Then what should I do?"
"It's simple. Set out with your own feet to find the answer. Hammer out a plan by opening a path with your own hands or something. Of course you can always ask someone for help too."
"…Set out, open a path, that sounds like Buddhist concept."
When I answered with another sigh, my mother softly embraced me like the others and leaving me only the words "I'll always help you too if you need it", she then slowly headed for her own room.
…The meaning behind my mother's words. It wasn't like I understood everything of it. But I believed it was important now to try everything possible. For now I was looking for what I could do.
Watching after my mother's back, I went to the living room too, where Luna, Machina and Kaorun were peeking at the hands of Hijiri, who enjoyed the game, while listening to the advices from Elni, as they were probably filled in about the game from Elni and Hijiri…. The living room was flourishing with smiling faces.
My vision fell on Elni, who had the happiest smile from all of them. While I watched her expression, the feeling in my chest that had sprouted earlier began to well up.
…I really wanted to please her more and make her smile.

I didn't know if that would lead me to a way to keep Elni here. But if that was what I could do right now, then I had no time to waste. I hurried over to the girls and started to talk as soon as I entered the living room.
"Hey, wanna have a game tournament with everyone next time?"
Most likely due to the sudden proposal, the girls asked back "A game tournament?" like a parrot, whereas only Kaorun slapped her hands together to whatever conclusion she came.
"I see, certainly. In other words, Shinobu-sama, you want to say: 'It'll be a treat from the great me! The winner will get a reward from me! Rejoice and participate, girls!', correct?"
"Yeah, a party sponsored by the great me!"
"An unexpected full approval!?"
"…No, wait, Kaorun. I didn't agree to everything."
Retorting to Kaorun, who had widened her eyes, I looked at everyone's faces with "But".
"It's certainly better to have some kind of bet for it, right? A time attack or a team battle, any way's fine. The winner or winning team can order the loser anything— how does that sound?"
While saying so, I threw a glance at Kaorun, smirked and cracked a joke.
"By the way, if I win, I plan to make you wear cat-ears instead of your maid headband and let you end your sentences with 'meow'."
"I do not want that, meow. Please refrain from doing so, meow. It is embarrassing, meow."
It was no longer a penalty. Kaorun ended her sentences with "meow", softly rested her hand on Hijiri's shoulder and filled her tone with passion.
"Hijiri-chan, this is a good chance.. If we win at the game tournament, let us make Shinobu-sama cross-dress. And then he will be the maid at our house for one day."
"Sh- Shinobu-kun will be a maid at our house? We can do that? Then is it possible too that I pet his head all I want?"
"Not just that, you could also embrace him, kiss him and sleep next to him at night."
"It's like a dream coming true…"
Th- This had gotten out of hand. Whatever they were imagining, not just Hijiri, but even Kaorun started to look dreamful. When I felt an

impatience, Machina timidly called out to Luna in the corner of my vision.
“Hey, what would you do if you win, Sister?”
“I want to take a bath together with Shinobu-san.”
“Th- Then let us three take a bath together if we win.”
…Now I couldn’t afford to lose anymore. If either Hijiri’s team or Luna’s team were to win, I feared that my reasoning wouldn’t last.
I even started to get a cold sweat, but Elni laughed with “Sounds fun!” while listening to everyone, so I prepared myself for the possibility of my loss and after we discussed it with everyone, we decided to have a game tournament in the living room of Hijiri’s house around this time next week…

♥♥!

—A lot had happened from the day last week, where I proposed the organisation of a game tournament, until today.
First, Nazuna and her best friend— Miichan aka Sakurarai Mizuki had heard the story from Elni and showed smiling faces that said that they wanted to participate in the tournament too. Then Miichan, surprisingly skilled with games, gave Luna, who was bad with machines, Hijiri, who was a beginner at games, and Elni, who was fired up for some special training, some fierce coaching, but… would that really pay off?
Finally we welcomed the day of the game tournament. In the broad living room of the Gogyou Household, Luna, Machina, Elni, Nazuna, Hijiri, Kaorun, Miichan and I had gathered with each a game console in one hand.
However, since we were so many, we decided after a short discussion that we would split into two teams and compete about which team would finish the same quest faster. We formed the teams by drawing lots.
Also, the team battle would produce too many winners, which would increase the penalties on the losers, so only the surviving players of the winning team were given the privilege of the winner. Furthermore the condition was added that the members of the team, which cleared the quest, that died during the competition would be treated

as losers.
And the result of the lots was the set-up: “Elni, Nazuna, Miichan, Me VS. Luna, Machina, Hijiri, Kaorun”. Kaorun exchanged looks with Hijiri, Luna and Machina, then they secretly started their strategy meeting with small voices.
On the other hand, Elni, Nazuna, Miichan and I formed a circle to push up our morale and when both teams had finished their preparations, the game started.
I was worried about what kind of scheme Kaorun had plotted, but my team had no beginners like Luna or Hijiri. Just playing normally, we should have the game in the bag.
And in fact, my team smoothly advanced the quest, whereas Kaorun’s team probably had a hard time. Kaorun suddenly raised a panicked voice during the match.
“Kuh! This does not look good. Hijiri-chan, Luna-san, Machina, we have to use that now! Like we have discussed— Please protect at least me with your lives!”
“Got it, Kaoru— wait, I never heard of this! What’re you thinking?”
“It is a joke to boost our teamwork.”
After replying brazenly to Machina’s tricked&retort combo, Kaorun said “Operation, start!” with vigour, whereupon the girls from our opponent team suddenly started to raise bewitching voices.
“Yahn, the monster’s thing is really stiff, Iyahn” said Machina.
“Uhn, if you do that, Ahn, I’ll be done for right away.” said Hijiri.
“Ahh, please stop it. You meanie. I am really weak against that.” said Luna.
“Hah, Shinobu-sama you pervert. Please do not tease me only there. Ahn.” said Kaorun.
Machina and Hijiri were somewhat bashful, whereas the natural erotic big sister Luna gave of the feeling of a wife. Moreover, the perverted maid attacked my mentality by mentioning my name.
Due to that, my concentration was greatly disturbed and while even the innocent Miichan and Nazuna turned bright red, Elni looked at me and raised her voice to overcome this crisis.
“Shinobu! We can only oppose them now with your special cool remark! We have no other choice, but to battle their sexy with your dandy! Show them the skills of the natural gigolo!”
“To my great regret, roger that. Sorry, but I’ll leave the fighting to you

guys. I'll retreat from the frontlines for now."
Suppressing my embarrassment, I looked over to the opponent team and resounded my voice as best as I could.
"—Three minutes. That's all it takes me to hunt monsters, or woman. By the way, Kaorun, give me five minutes and I can strip a girl butt-naked."
"Wh- Why are you boasting about that only to me!? Or rather, this tactic is unfair, Shinobu-sama! Myself aside, it is a bit risky for Machina! And Hijiri-chan and Luna-san are already off in their dream world. This is too much!"
"—Now that it has come to this, only a God can stop me."
"And I, a Goddess, have no intentions at all to stop him! The perfect brains come up with the perfect tactic! The schemer fell into the snares of schemes, Kaorun! Show them the power of the natural gigolo, Shinobu!"
Strongly urged by Elni, I once again made a nice voice to hassle them.
"If every day was a Friday, I could hold you every night." "Like a prince on a white horse? I hear that a lot." "I zoom in to your eyes."
"—Ah, I forgot to record Dorae*on."
To be honest, I was quickly running out of ideas and I changed my remarks aimed at Kaorun into gags, whereupon she finally burst out in a laughter and for some reason, Luna, Hijiri and Machina flushed their cheeks. It had an unexpected great effect. This should lower their morale.
Even while feeling a bit guilty, I shifted my gaze back to my team-mates at once.
But, apparently Miichan was spellbound with "So wonderful, Shinobu-oniisan…" like Luna and the others, whereas Nazuna turned teary with "Uwah! Because neither Brother or Miichan are playing, I died!" and Elni raised an agitated voice with "The natural gigolo is a double-edged sword!?".
It might have been us, who fell into the snares of schemes. Looking at each other, Elni and I broke out into a cold sweat, whereas Kaorun, as she was taking this as her chance to win,
"Girls! Now! Operation Part 2!"
suddenly raised a voice, then she, the announcer, rested her well-formed breasts onto my head first. Next, Luna and Hijiri clung to me

from both sides, albeit reserved.
D- Damn, so unfair. Kaorun's bouncing beautiful breasts on my head. Hijiri and Luna's soft and delicious breasts that sometimes pressed on both my elbows. On top of that, the sweet fragrance from all three of them came over me and while I was losing my head, I could hear Machina's sad shout from behind me.
"Hey! There's no place for me! That's not fair! And my character is about to di— Aww!"
"…It appears that Machina passed away."
"I'm afraid Luna-san and my character died as well, Kaoru-san…"
"Why!? Why out of the blue!?"
Kaorun widened her eyes, whereas Hijiri and Luna each flushed their cheeks and replied.
"Ehm, Shinobu-kun's body was just so warm and pleasant that I inadvertently got immersed."
"Same for me… It does not affect you, Kaoru-san?"
"What are you saying, Luna-san? There is no way that it does not it affect me. As a matter of fact, my character is ascending to heaven right now."
Pulling back her breasts that rested on my head, Kaorun nonchalant replied so. In that moment,
"Wh- Why! Wasn't the plan that you slay the monster while we agitate Shinobu-kun!?" "Besides, only I can't hug onto him! That's not what we arranged, Kaoru! This is totally different from your plan!" "E- Even I did not expect that Shinobu-sama's body would make me this nervous!" "It is only natural, since Shinobu-san is so wonderful."
Like that, Hijiri, Machina and Kaorun started to make a ruckus, but only Luna still seemed to be spellbound and when I my attention was attracted to the girls,
"—Yay! I defeated the monster, Shinobu! We won!"
Elni raised both her hands while I had my eyes off the game, and declared victory. When I dropped my gaze again there, the screen of the game certainly displayed the words "Quest Cleared".
…Fufu, I didn't participate in the battle at all.
Unable to immerse myself in the joy of victory, I felt a faint emptiness, whereupon Elni, either happy about the victory or just enjoying playing with everyone,
"Ahaha! Shinobu and I won! Thanks for your support, Nazucat,

Miichan! Let's take a picture, so that I won't forget this day!"
rejoiced innocently, took out a digital camera and stored everyone's appearance within the camera like she had said. Amidst that, Luna, Machina, Hijiri and Kaorun looked at each other, then smiled softly, as their earlier noisy voices had disappeared somewhere, and gave Elni and me, the winners, a warm applause.
Also, Nazuna and Miichan each hugged onto Elni, despite their own loss, and said "Congratulations, Elni-chan!" "You did it, Elni-san!" with a smile. I also faced Elni and lightly changed my tone.
"Hey Elni, if you want, I can give you my winner privilege."
"Eh? Really? Don't you have something you want them to do too?"
…If it makes you happy, I'm fine with that.
Conveying that to Elni by the heart, I opened my mouth with a wry smile.
"I certainly have, but I didn't do anything this time. Not participating in the battle, I made coaxing remarks, agitated Miichan and didn't even notice that Nazuna was in a pinch."
But even so, I was set on my wish for when we won. I would give Elni my winner privilege. And that feeling hadn't changed even now.
"I can't really say that I won this, because I didn't do anything. So I would feel bad to get the winner privilege. Thus, I'm giving it to you. Well, consider it a present from me."
A present from me— At least these words were meant sincere. I believed that I hid that, but she might actually have noticed it.
"Thanks for the wonderful present, Shinobu."
With a bright smile, Elni tightly hugged onto me. Elni's small and soft body. Even while I got quite agitated from that sensation, I clad myself in composure and quickly changed the topic.
"B- By the way, Elni, everyone came with all kind of hopes into this contest, but what about you? Is there anything you want to do?"
"Mhm~ I can't really think of anything, but I would like something that we all can do together."
Turning her head in my arms, Elni shifted her gaze towards the others and animated her voice with "Okay!", as she already came up with something.
"Let's all take a nap together!"
"Okay, that's not really something you do together."
As expected, I couldn't help but retort…

A nap with everyone. A really modest wish from Elni. Everyone responded to it with smiles and mattresses were spread in the broad living room of the Gogyou Mansion one after another to really take a nap.
…If anyone were to see us, they would surely widen their eyes in surprise. Actually, was Elni alright with using one of her wishes for something like that?
While I felt doubtful, a rock-paper-scissors tournament started over the two positions next to me after the game tournament. As a result, Luna, Kaorun and Machina laid in that order right from me and Hijiri, Nazuna and Miichan laid in that order left from.
And, of all things, Elni insisted on sleeping in my arms, asserting her winner privilege to her heart's content. Since no one could say anything against it, she snuggled her smooth cheek against my chest and relaxed the corners of her mouth happily. She was so cute that I wanted to embrace her like that and pet her head.
But Elni's waist was so slender that it seemed that I would break her if I embraced her too tightly, and her breasts of moderate size, proud of a marshmallow-like softness, pressed squishy on my body for a while now. Moreover, she emitted a sweet fragrance.
…Not a situation in which I could sleep. Time passed without the tension leaving my body and while everyone else's peaceful sleeping sounds filled the living room at some point, Elni suddenly straightened up her upper body.
When I raised my head doubtfully, she put up her index finger with "Ssh", took out the digital camera from her pocket and took pictures of everyone sleeping.
A keepsake photo shooting á la Kaorun. After she was done with that, Elni nodded satisfied and leaned her cheek against my chest again, whereas I casually opened my mouth.
"Can't you sleep, or what?"
"Thinking about my wish was just so fun that I got wide-awake."
"I see. So, how's it, Elni? Settled on a wish yet?"
"Yeah, it was a bit difficult, but I decided to play together with everyone after all."
Replying affirming to my question, Elni might a bright smile and continued.
"I'll ask Miichan to keep up the game coaching. With Hijiri and

Kaorun, I'll go star gazing. I know a good spot for that. And together with Luna, Machina and Nazucat, I'll go somewhere to have fun. By the way, I'll have you accompany me on everything, Shinobu."
"Haha, that's gonna be great."
Forgetting to joke around, I smiled faintly, Elni said quietly after a short pause.
"Shinobu, thank you so much for today."
"Mh? Where did that come from?"
"I mean, you held the game tournament for me, right? So that I would get better at it and have fun together with everyone."
"…Did you enjoy it?"
"Of course. I came to like everyone of you even more. I'm really happy."
Her heartfelt words slowly filled up the entirety of my chest.
"Hey Elni, the fun things will still keep coming from now on."
I naturally spoke out my feelings.
"First we'll have a Christmas party with everyone. Then we'll eat traditional dishes with everyone on new year's eve and on new year, we'll all go together to the first shrine visit. And should it snow, we could have a snowball fight with everyone."
"…I'm sure you'll make everyone laugh again then."
"Yeah, I'll try my best. The winter can be annoying due to the cold sometimes, but it has lots of fun things too. And right after the winter comes the spring anyway, so we can go watch the cherry blossoms with everyone."
"Luna'll surely make a delicious lunch pack. And maybe Machina's cooking skills will have improved by that time…"
"Machina's a hard-working girl after all. If you teach her properly, she'll be able to cook in no time. I think we'll be able to eat Machina's cooking when we watch the cherry blossoms next year. Also, Elni, once spring is over, it'll be summer, so let's go to my gramps' vacation house again like this year."
Along with my words, I softly stroked through Elni's hair while still holding back the feelings in my chest.
"You came along too, Elni. I don't want you alone to be missing in the memories we create from now on. With you here, with everyone together, we make memories like before, then we all should be able to smile forever."

The days with everyone together that seemed so easily to forget, yet were so precious. If such days kept occurring, if we all spent precious ordinary days together, then surely…
Wanting to convey my welling up feelings, I slowly embraced Elni.
“You said before that you don’t want to see crying faces, right? Sure, some day everything might turn into just memories. But if you make a lot of memories like today, then no matter how painful or bitter it gets and even if there are crying faces, I’m sure everyone will smile at the end as long as you have memories together.”
Still embracing her, I peacefully spun my words with “Therefore, Elni,”.
“Stay with us for longer. Let’s make memories together. There’s still so much I want to do for you. So much I want you to do. It’s too early to leave us.”
“…Being next to you is like bathing in the sun, Shinobu.”
How did my feelings affect her heart? Letting faint tears dwell up in her red eyes, Elni trembled her voice a bit.
“I keep having the same dream. A small, yet warm house. My beloved mother by my side. I want to return to that sunny spot. I keep having this dream that will never come true. But when I’m with you, Shinobu, I seem to forget about that dream. So…”
Tightly clinging to me, Elni showed a soft smile while still teary.
“I like being by your side. It’s so warm here. I really don’t want to leave. I want to stay with you…”
Her heartfelt words and her warmth I felt from her body made me stupidly happy and a bit teary. I felt that I had reached her. I was sure that if I kept making memories like this, Elni would stay by my side.
Therefore I slightly increased the strength in my squeeze onto her and feeling Elni within my arms, I sunk into a peaceful sleep like being guided by her warmth…

What I felt along with a weird voice was a soft warmth that filled my chest. A sweet fragrance swept over my nose tip. Except the weird voice, it was probably from Elni. It reminded me, after the game tournament, we all took a nap together… Just when I recalled that,
“…Shinobu-sama will come to love maids. He will want to pet the maid’s head. He will want to embrace the maid. And he will come to love Hijiri-chan too…”

A weird whispering reached my ears again and when I doubtfully opened my eyes a bit, my vision fell onto Elni still sleeping in my arms. Yeah, she was really cute. Next I shifted my gaze, whereupon I saw the side-profile of the perverted maid that had her lips close to my ear. Yeah, what was she doing?
“…Could it be, you’re trying to indoctrinate me?”
“No, please consider it a hypnopaedia. For you information, at first I whispered ‘Maid, Maid, Maid…’ near your ear, but how was it? Did you have a sweet maid dream?”

“No, not at all, but why would you do that?”
“Because I wanted you to have a nice dream. But during my whispering, Luna-san leaked a sweet ‘Shinobu-saan’ voice in her sleep and clung to you, so I got a bit jealous and switched over to the hypnopaedia.”
“For now I’ll ignore the stuff about hypnopaedia. More importantly,

Luna seems to be gone already, but look, Elni's still on me. That doesn't make you jealous?"
"Elni-san is a different matter.", Kaorun gave an instant reply.
"…Aren't you a bit lenient on Elni?"
"Well, I do owe Elni-san a lot, so of course I will be lenient."
Giving a surprising reply, Kaorun shifted her gaze to Elni's sleeping face.
"Elni-san is such a mysterious person. Usually she is innocent like a child, but sometimes she appears so mature and I get the feeling that she sees through everything. I assume that I will never be able to win against her."
"Reminds me, didn't you say something similar before?"
If I remembered correctly, it was when Kaorun ran away from home and came over to us, where she played a prank on the sleeping Luna by making her wear a cow-patterned swimsuit. As Kaorun recalled that time too, she showed a small smile and opened her mouth.
"Elni-san knew right away that my prank on Luna-san back then was my way of fawning over someone and told me: 'You can play pranks on me too. Because I like you, Kaorun.'. Back then I escaped due to my embarrassment, but I was actually happy."
Gently narrowing her eyes, Kaorun lightly flushed her cheeks and continued.
"Therefore I believe that I cannot match Elni-san."
"You don't just love Luna and Machina… but Elni too, huh."
"Yes, that is correct. Because she pushed my back at that time."
"…That time?"
Not hiding her embarrassment on a rare occasion, Kaorun affirmed honestly. However, unable to understand the meaning behind her words, I asked back like a parrot, whereupon Elni slowly opened her eyelids, as she woke up from our voices, and faced me with her silver hair swaying.
Upon that, a smile bloomed on her face with "It's Shinobu…" as soon as she recognized me and then she burrowed her cheek into my chest spoiled.
"Hey, what's up, Elni? You seem rather happy."
"Yeah! I didn't see that dream today. I'm sure it was because you were so close by, Shinobu."

“…I was here too, you know?”
When Kaorun interjected reserved, Elni turned her smile towards her.
“Right. It’s thanks to you, Kaorun and everyone else for staying with me. It’s been a while since I slept so well!”
While saying so, she stretched herself luxuriously, then knitted her eyebrows a bit.
“…I’m kinda hungry.”
“Then I will go prepare dinner now. Please stay for dinner here as well, Elni-san.”
“Then I’ll help you! And Machina too!”
“…Machina as well?”, with that Kaorun showed a slightly surprised expression, but unconcerned about it, Elni proceeded excitedly and lightly shook the shoulders of the cheerfully sleeping Machina.
“Wake up, Machina. We’re going to make dinner with Kaorun now. C’mon, wake up, Machina. You asked me to teach you how to cook before, right?”
…We really might get to enjoy Machina’s cooking at the cherry blossom viewing next year. Elni pulled the awakened Machina on her hand with a smile. Machina, with drowsy eyes, was dragged away by Elni. Watching their backs that made them look like sisters, I thought:
I hope Elni will be with us under the cherry trees next year…

♥♥!

—Stop raining.
Looking up the rainy sky through the window of the classroom, I absent-minded thought so. The rain that started last night, still hadn’t let up. The pattering of the rain resounded in the quiet classroom after school and I shifted my gaze with a sigh.
There were Machina and an unknown female student sitting on the classroom’s chairs. Apparently the girl had something to discuss with Machina, the student president, and kept talking with her with a serious expression for a while now.
“…So, like I told you before, I’m the vice-captain of the female karate club. The captain is a bit scary and clumsy, but everyone

knows that she's really good at taking care of others and kind, so we all loved her, but…"
Midway in her sentence, she, the vice-captain of the karate club dropped her voice and continued.
"Lately the captain is somewhat on her toes and started, well, to put us all to hard work by saying 'You're slacking off'. I pointed it out to her numerous times, but she isn't listening at all and even when I consulted our advisor or the seniors, they all just seemed scared of the captain… At this rate the captain will be hated by everyone."
Tearing up a bit, the vice-captain looked straight into Machina's eyes.
"So I came here, thinking you might be able to help me, President Orangelo."
"…Why didn't you come to me first?"
"Well, making you help out for something this trivial is…"
The vice-captain beat a bit around the bush, whereas Machina declared softly.
"It's not trivial. It's an important matter for you, right? So I have no reason to turn you down. I believe that's exactly what a student president exists for."
Softly grabbing the vice-captain's hand, Machina smiled gently.
"Don't worry. Leave it to me. I'll do what I can."
Her smile was really kind and quite pretty. Seeing that, the vice-captain stopped blinking as she was fascinated, but
"I'll come by later, so wait a bit."
"…Ah, yes. Thank you very much."
When Machina called out to her, the vice-captain returned to her senses and said her thanks, leaving the classroom with red cheeks.
On the other hand, Machina shifted her gaze towards me and knitted her eyebrows a bit.
"Sorry, Shinobu. I got something to do, so I can't go home with you today either."
"Well, it's too bad, but there's nothing we can do about it. Still, being the president sure is hard work."
"But I'm happy when I'm thanked for the hard work, so it's worth it. Besides, I heard rumours about the female karate club anyway and was a bit concerned about it. This is a good chance."
"Right. It might indeed be, but are you going there alone? It's about the captain of the karate club, right? If you want, I can go with you."

“I’m happy that you worry about me, but I’ll ask Hijiri for this. It should be easier with just girls, right?”
Gentle turned down, I dropped my shoulders with “I see…”, whereupon she peered into my face and flushed her cheeks somewhat.
“You look down, Shinobu. Did you want to go home with me that bad?”
“Well, that too, but I thought about dropping by the nursery school with you today. Elni’s working there, remember? I want to go pick her up, but it’s a bit difficult for a guy to show up at a nursery school all alone.”
It would be bad if I were taken for someone suspicious. While I showed a wry smile, Machina now dropped her shoulders and sighed.
“…It’s really too bad. It doesn’t seem like I can make it today. But properly go pick her up, even by yourself, okay Shinobu? I’m sure Elni will be delighted.”
While saying so, she shifted her gaze to beyond the window and after a moment, Machina said isolated.
“Elni has changed a bit these days.”
“Mh? Really? I can’t really tell.”
“She did. How can I say it? She’s not so distant as before anymore.”
Brimming with a smile, she started to speak peacefully.
“Elni… doesn’t talk about herself at all, right? We don’t know how she was like as a kid, why she’s calling herself a Goddess, nor what kind of life she lived before. But she can get along with anyone and gets liked by anyone… So it sometimes makes me think.”
Dropping her gaze a bit, Machina filled her voice with a bit of sadness.
“That Elni actually might not need us. That she can live on without us just fine, will get along with someone else and leave for somewhere else before we know it… At times, I get such a worry.”
“…She might actually give off these vibes.”
“But you know, Shinobu, these days Elni comes into my bed with ‘It’s cold, so let’s sleep together’ every day. Until now Elni had troubles falling asleep, often cried from nightmares and cried worried about my possible return to the demon realm. She would easily wake up even in the middle of the night, yet she soundly slept together with

me until morning yesterday again.”
Smiling happily, she made a tenderly voice.
“And in the morning she smiled with ‘When I sleep together with you, Machina, I don’t have that dream’, so now I think that Elni will stay with us like this…”
“Yeah, I think so too.”
Letting my the corners of my mouth from a smile, I agreed, whereupon Machina averted her gaze from the window and smiled a bit bashful.
“Now we have prattled away. I have work for the student council left, so I’ll go now. Take care of Elni, okay?”
Replying “Yeah, leave it to me” to Machina, I parted with her and left the school, then I spread my umbrella amidst the light rain and slowly headed for the nursery school.
Reminded me, Elni said the boys were making fun of her, but her gaming skills increased, so she should get along with the kids now?
While listening to the mild sound of the rain, I proceeded with these thoughts in mind, whereupon I suddenly ran into a familiar girl on the roadside.
Big eyes that drew you in and a smooth bridge of the nose. A body line with intense up and downs. Maybe they were even bigger than F-Cups? This girl— Minami brightened her expression upon noticing me, came rushing over, linked arms with me, still holding the umbrella, and snuggled up to me like that.
“…Hey, what’s this all of the sudden? Can’t you back off a bit?”
“Iyah~ We only just met, Shinobu-chan you meanie.”
When I softly pushed her aside, Minami leaked a rather enchanting voice and bounced her huge breasts. She most likely did it unconsciously. She got away from me and started talking like nothing had happened.
“So, where are you going today, Shinobu-chan? Your house is the other way, isn’t it?”
“Well, some stuff… wait, speaking of, I heard you’re working at a nursery school?”
When I suddenly brought up the matter I remembered hearing from Elni, Minami replied with a small “Yeah” nod.
“I’m just heading there now, but did you hear it from Elni-chan? By the way, I heard a lot from her. Like how awesome you usually are.”

“Oh? You two are close buddies now?”
“Yep. I mean, Elni-chan came to school a few times, remember? Like bringing you your lunch. And I spotted her at the culture and sports festival too, so I got a bit interested. I want to get even closer to her and talk about a lot of things from now on.”
“Hee…Incidentally I also heard a lot about you from Elni. Seems the kids quite adore you, Minami-sensei.”
“…I put in a lot of work for that, you know?”
When I called her with a title, Minami-sensei aka Minami replied with a wry smile.
“At first the boys called me ‘Boobie Girl’ and when I tightly squeezed them onto my breasts for a test, they all fled with red faces. After that they completely avoided me, you know? I don’t know why, my little brother quite liked it.”
“No, no, of course the reactions will be different when you’re an ‘older girl’ for them and an ‘older sister’ for him.”
“Mhm~ I don’t really get it, but when I consulted the other teachers at the nursery school, they told me ‘Be a Tsundere’, but I don’t know much about being ‘Tsun’. I’m just telling them ‘Want to take a bath together?’, ‘Do you like boobs?’ or ‘You’re so cute’, because the kids like it.”
“…From today on, I grant you the title ‘natural erotic’.”
“I, I’m not erotic! I just like kids!”
She replied to my joke with her cheeks puffed up and while I headed to the nursery school side-by-side with her, I told her that I was going to pick up Elni, whereupon Minami suddenly showed a smile and opened her mouth.
“But I have to say, Elni-chan’s amazing. It took me so much time, but she already gets along with the boys.”
Must have been thanks to the game tournament. While I relaxed my expression, Minami animated her voice with “And you know,” and continued.
“Elni-chan plays games together with the boys, gets the girls to join these days too and tells original stories while playing the guitar. The kids are super happy. I want to be like Elni-chan too.”
“I’m sure you can change in a better way. After all, you got cuter again… and your breasts even bigger.”
“I, I don’t want them to get any bigger than this!”

Midway I got embarrassed and brushed if off with a joke, but Minami had really changed.
As a child, she was a withdrawn girl that cried easily, my childhood friend. Over the years, she had become even more charming than before.
…The future was unknown, but people surely changed bit by bit. Luna and the other had changed favourably too. And while it might be small, there had been a change in Elni as well.
—Elni has changed a bit these days.
Recalling Machina's earlier words, I smiled faintly again, whereupon Minami stared at my face and softened her expression for some reason.
"These days, you have changed a bit, Shinobu-chan."
"…I got more manly, right?"
"That too, but how can I say… It's like you're back to your former self."
"My former self?"
Hijiri and the others told me too that I had changed a bit, but what did she mean with back to my former self? When I asked back doubtful, Minami smiled and continued.
"In the past, you were really popular. It's like you've changed back to that. Your look is still a bit fierce, but your aura resembles the one from back then. A soft and warm one."
"Guess I really have become mild."
Well, I couldn't really tell myself, but… my aura changed back to that of my former self, huh. Still unaware of my own change, I continued to chit-chat with Minami and moved to the nursery school. After entering the school and explaining to the teachers that I was a relative of Elni, I parted with Minami and peeked into a classroom.
"Hey Elni, tell us another story." "Geez, Aki-kun, that's Elni-oneechan now, not just Elni." "No wait, it's Goddess. Elni-san seriously is a God, man"
Apparently Elni still wasn't called by the teacher title.
However, she was surrounded by a lot of children in the middle of the classroom and replied to the children with a smile while playing her guitar, which she probably brought with her from home.
"Okay, like you requested, I'll tell you a story. One, Two, Three~ Once upon a time~ Urashima saved~ a turtle~ and was eaten by it~"

“EHH!? What a scary turtle!” “Hey, Elni! You made Sanae-chan cry!” “Wicked. Nothing less of Elni-san, she goes way beyond our expectations. Seriously a God. Respect, man.”
Hearing Elni’s joke, there was one kid that repeated the somewhat famous “Seriously a God” phrase, but all the children seemed displeased. Seeing that, Elni cleared her throat with a small cough to pull herself together.
“Ehm, then it’ll be Aladdin and the magic lamp! Through some happenings, Aladdin was flying through the sky by riding a magic carpet! This carpet amazingly— costs only 10k yen now! And the lamp comes with it too for 10k yen! You can’t miss this chance!”
“This isn’t an infomercial, Elni!” “Ehm, Elni-oneechan, I want to hear the usual story about the stupid girl now.” “I want that too, God aka Elni-san. Please tell us the usual story about the stupid girl.”
Begged by the children, Elni made a bitter face with “Strange. I thought this was funny. I came up with it together with Nazucat yesterday…”, but she reached out her fingers to the guitar while the children still begged her, and started to play a gentle melody, different from before.
“…Once upon a time, there was a stupid girl. She was a really stupid girl that made her beloved mother cry. At some point the girl wasn’t wanted by anyone anymore and was all alone. The girl was really sad and went on a trip to look for a place to belong to.”
“…Somehow Elni’s story always starts from there.” “Ssh, be quiet, Aki-kun.” “Obey Sanae-chan, man. The story’s getting good now.”
The children spoke with small voices. Elni watched over them with slightly narrowed eyes and continued the story soft and calmly while playing the guitar.
“Will she find a nice place? The girl continued her trip cheerful. And one day, the girl met a pretty female musician. That woman had lost her husband and daughter early and was always crying…”
As they were captivated by the story, all the children closed their mouths and listened to Elni.
“Seeing the crying woman, the girl remembered her own mother. Therefore she wanted to cheer her up. But the girl was stupid, so she could only make her laugh by telling stupid jokes. Even so, she did not leave the woman.”
I too was captivated by her story that I inadvertently was about to

dismiss the raining sound.
“It happened one a certain warm day. The half-asleep girl thoughtlessly called the woman ‘Mom’. At that time, the woman smiled at her with ‘Yes?’. The girl would never forget that expression. Because it was the first time that the woman showed a smile.”
…Strange…
“After that, the woman loved the girl like her own daughter. They took baths together, eat meals together and slept together at night, living a happy life with the two of them.”
Elni’s tone was gentle and peaceful the whole time. And along with the sound of the guitar, she continued the story.
That she learned how to play the guitar from the female musician. That the woman sung her a lot of pretty songs. That the woman said that she wanted to stay with her forever. That the two of them participating in a town event with a song. Elni spun the story with the same tone. But I got a strange feeling.
“…And their performance was a great hit. The residents gave them cheers and applause. The girl and woman smiled at each other and return to their home while holding hands. The end…”
When Elni peacefully ended the story, a little girl timidly raised her hand amongst the children.
“Hey, Elni-oneechan, what happened to the stupid girl and woman afterwards?”
Hearing the innocent question… Elni deepened the sadness she had for a while now for some reason, and just replied with gentle words.
“The crying woman… didn’t cry again. She kept smiling the whole time and lived together with the girl.”
Hearing Elni’s answer, the girl said “I see” and faced a boy next to her.
“That was a nice story, wasn’t it, Aki-kun?” “Yeah, but how long is the stupid girl going to travel? The other day, she was taught how to cook and make accessories from a man and woman. Today it’s the guitar. She’s travelling a lot.” “…I’ll kill you, dude, if you diss Elni-san’s story. All stories are interesting, so what’s the problem? Specially the story about the devil extermination was really good. The part about the delinquent devil hunter’s growth was the best. Total respect to you, Elni-san.”

All the children loved Elni's stories. All of them were smiling, where as Elni still had a gentle, yet somewhat sad expression, which bothered me greatly, so I entered the classroom with "Excuse me".
In that moment, Elni dampened her wide opened eyes in no time upon noticing me for whatever reason, put the guitar on the ground and rushed over to me in a straight line, tightly clinging to me.
"…Huh? Eh? Elni?"
Just what was going on? Not saying anything, Elni trembled her body a bit in my arms. Getting this unforeseen reaction, I certainly was a bit bewildered.
"Ehm, Elni, what's up with you? I came to pick you, but are you okay?"
For some reason, after the words "pick you up", the trembling of Elni's body became stronger. To be honest, I couldn't really understand this situation, but for now I tried to pet her head, whereupon the children approached me bustling.
"Are you Elni-oneechan's lover?" "EHH!? No way!? Elni has a lover!?" "Aki, it's too bad for you, but it's THE END for your first love. A boy and girl meet, then mature. Elni-san seriously is a god."
Just how often did he need to say God until he was satisfied? I got a bit wearily, whereupon the children gathered near Elni, who looked like she was about to cry any moment, out of worry and each called her name with "Elni".
There Elni got away from me, as she returned to her senses, wiped away the tears that had dwelled up in the corner of her eyes and coughed again to brush it off. She looked at the children with a meek expression for some reason.
"…Kids, it's not 'Elni', right? Call me 'Goddess' like always. Or 'God' like Keisuke does."
"Say that again and I'll tease you by destroying your sand castle again, Elni."
"Wh- Why are you saying that now! Shinobu is here! Why don't you let me show off a bit in front of him— wait, Aki! Where're you going with my guitar! It's my treasure! Please give it back!"
"Nope! I'll never give it back!"
Holding Elni's supposed treasure, the guitar with his small body, the boy ran away with teary eyes for some reason."
"Stupid Elni! You're the worst for flirting with this cookie-cutter guy!

Elni you twit!”
“M- Me aside, I won’t forgive you for badmouthing Shinobu! To begin with, Shinobu isn’t a cookie-cutter guy! He’s a cookie-eating guy!”
“Hey, what’re you taking me for? That’s not even helpful, Elni… wait, why are you girls climbing up my body?”
For some reason, a couple of girls were happily climbing up from legs towards my shoulders with all their might one after another. What was up with them? My body wasn’t a jungle gym.
I didn’t even had the time to retort like that.
“Uwah~n! Elni-oneechan disappeared, chasing after Aki-kun!” “I need to go to the toilet!” “Fufu, this pattering rain stirs my heart up. I’ll stop this wailing rain!” “H- Hey, you can’t go out by yourself.” “So what? I need no reason to rebel. That’s youth, man. I’ll never obey anyone but Elni-san.”
With their leader Elni gone, the children started to revolt in no time.
…It might be harder than I thought to deal with nursery kids. But still, this girl on my shoulders, what was she doing by lightly pushing out her lips?

Later, Elni came back with the run-away boy while preciously holding her guitar, and we somehow dwelled the children’s revolt.
Incidentally, Elni’s working hours were now over, and we gave Minami, the other teachers and the sad-looking children our farewell. Then we each spread our umbrella in the rain and left the nursery school behind us, but… for a while now, Elni was a bit strange.
Even while walking side-by-side on the way home, she was rather short-spoken, fleetingly snuck peeks at me, which made her blush, and when our eyes met, she hastily covered her face with the umbrella.
…What was up with these reactions? Was she bashful? But why?
Tilting my head clueless, I started talking, as I couldn’t endure the silence.
“I, I have to say, you sure are getting along with the kids now.”
“…Yeah. It’s thanks to the game tournament you organized the other day, Shinobu. While we were playing a game together, the boys opened up to me.”
“I don’t think that’s the only reason. You make a good older sister, so the kids came to like you. They were all seriously listening to your story and were having fun, making really enjoyable looks.”

“I’m happy about that… but I don’t really want to tell that story. Unlike Minami, I’m not good at telling normal fairy tales, so I unintentionally told that story. After that the kids pestered me about it…I always end up telling a lie at the end.”
“A lie? In that story?”
On my casual question, Elni dropped her gaze and replied.
“The story still goes on after that. The stupid girl made the woman, who taught her how to play the guitar, the precious person, who gave her so many things, cry in the end, just like with her beloved mother. And not just that woman. She always… made her beloved friends that she met, cry in the end… every single time.”
Lightly trembling the small hand that held the umbrella, she blurred her voice a bit.
“The stupid girl, you know, is actually a real cry-baby. She’s sad alone, wants a place to belong to and keeps looking for someone… then ends up making a precious person cry again. She actually noticed it, but since she’s stupid after all, she never tried to accept it.”
Hiding her expression that looked like it would constrict any moment, Elni squeezed out a cracked voice.
“She shouldn’t have looked for a place to belong to. She would never return to the warm house full of smiles with her beloved mother and herself. She can’t become anyone’s family— She never tried to accept that.”
…The rain fell. It surely would continue forever. It might have been raining all the time in her heart. Not stopping once, falling forever…
Therefore— Stop raining.
I desperately wished so, but it wasn’t enough, so I wanted to do something else for her. While I stopped to find words that would make flowers blossom in her heart,
“…When I’m playing with the kids in the nursery school, I remember the past.”
Still hiding her expression with the umbrella, Elni voiced out the pattering rain of her heart.
“When I was small, I was still allowed to play with my friends. Playing around innocently by running through the fields and making flower crowns, everyone always gets picked up by their mothers when dawn comes. But…”

Her quiet raining sounds gradually got fiercer.
“My mother is no longer there. So it was a bit painful for me and I was really envious. All kind of mothers come to the nursery school every day to pick up their children, saying let’s go home. That makes me remember the past and even though there’s no way she’ll come, I… I’m really stupid, right? I have always been looking for my mother.”
The rain didn‘t stop just from wishing for it. However,
“But today you came, Shinobu. You said ‘I came to pick you up’. It might be embarrassing, but I was so happy that I could cry.”
Because even someone like me could make her happy,
“When I look at your face, I’m reminded of everyone’s smiles. Luna, Machina, Nazucat and Tomoe-san. And even Hijiri, Kaorun and Miichan. When you came to pick me up, I finally realized that my most precious place had become my second most precious one at some point.”
I could no longer hear the rain. See, it stopped. The flowers bloomed, didn’t they? Elni slowly peeked out from under the umbrella. Her expression was… like a sunflower.
“—Shinobu, let’s go home.”
Slowly folding the umbrella, Elni clung onto my arm without hesitation. The warmth that slowly filled my chest simply made me happy. Elni looked grinning at me, who matched her walking pace.

“…It’s kinda nice. Really nice.”
Amidst the gentle rain, her whisper resounded quietly.
“I always hated the rain. I thought I would be all alone on rainy days, since no one would come out. But now everyone’s with me. The way home is so much fun. Therefore— I don’t hate the rain anymore.”
“…I’ll, come to pick you up again.”

Suddenly I realized anew. Even when you were happily, your voice was quite trembling.
“Then let’s go home together again, Elni.”
“Then I have to keep working.”
We slightly embarrassed shared an umbrella. Elni smiled right next to me. In the rain bloomed a flower, namely her smile.
The unrest in my chest was slowly disappearing. It was alright now. Without doubt, we would be able to welcome Christmas this year with everyone smiling. I hoped that one day we would laugh about her parting words. I got the feeling that I got closer to her. We finally grew accustomed.
What would passing by people think about us? Looking us two going home together… Would they consider us a family? I was overflowing with happiness from the soft warmth coming from my side right now.

Chapter 03

Sorry, everyone...

Escaping from the lonely room she was shut in, the little girl went on a trip. She thought that she would make a new family from now on. She believed so.
The normal everyday life she had always yearned for. This time she wouldn't make her precious people cry. Never. She didn't want to make them cry, yet in her memories, all her precious people were always crying.
Therefore the girl cast aside her precious people she had made at some point, suddenly disappearing from their sight with just leaving a thanks.
All the people, touched by her smile or enveloped by her kindness, had become strong. Even the boy who was called a failure. Even the crying woman. Even the man who wouldn't laugh. They became so strong that they could live on alone now, even without the girl. So the little girl set out on her journey with a peace of mind.
And when the girl left, everyone cried loudly. But the girl knew. These tears wouldn't continue on forever. Soon enough they would smile again. They would remember her smile too. That was enough. As long as she had memories with everyone, as long as everyone was smiling, she could keep on living with just that.
…It's okay, I'll be fine.
Convincing herself like that, the girl wanted everyone to remember her smiling face, so the girl kept enduring not to cry and went around all kind of places in the world, ignoring her own wish.
During that, only one boy looked for the girl without giving up. He kept chasing after her, finally shedding tears.
"Tell me why… Elni."
The boy's voice didn't reach the girl. The pouring rain, the rain the girl had hated, washed away the voice of the boy while he stood just there crying his voice out…

♥♥!

A carefree walk home after school on a Friday. As usual, Machina was busy with work of the student council, so I went home alone after I dropped by the bookstore. Opening the front door, I raised my voice with “I’m home”, whereupon not Luna appeared straight from the living room, but Elni’s smiling face.
Reminded me, she said during breakfast that she was only going to work until noon today at the nursery school. I got the feeling that Luna said something about picking her up then, but oh well.
Elni peeked her face out. As soon as she noticed me, her cheeks flushed into a light pink and she came rushing over like a dog that found his master, clinging to me with a bright smile.
“Welcome home, Shinobu! It was cold outside, wasn’t it? What’s my present today?”
“The fact that I returned safely with a smile. That’s the best present.”
“Yeah! Right! I’m happy too about your smile too!”
Regardless of me joking back to her joke about a present, Elni snuggled up to me like a spoiled cat. Sure, Elni was usually adorable, but was she ever this charming? While I got a bit agitated, Elni brightened her smile and continued.
“Listen, Shinobu, tomorrow is a holiday, so I’m going stargazing with Hijiri and Kaorun today after dinner. You’ll come along, right?”
“Of course, but speaking of, you already said that after the game tournament, didn’t you.”
But even without specially using her winner privilege, the girls would accept a normal invitation too, wouldn’t they? While thinking about that, I suddenly got bothered by something and made a casual question.
“Anyway, Luna unusually didn’t come to greet me, what’s up with her?”
“She’s having a special training in the living room. She’s really focussed on that.”
Special training? What was it? With my interest piqued, I headed for the living room at once, whereupon
“Hop~ Hop~♪“
Somehow, Luna was doing something weird in the very middle of the living room.
She waggled both her hands next to her head, probably mimicking

rabbit ears, and was jumping right and left innocently. On a glance, she looked like a miss in a kids show.
However, every time she jumped, her voluminous breasts bounced to the left and right, swayed greatly and moved up and down jelly-like. Luna's behaviour was incredible adorable and exquisitely erotic at the same time.
"The Rabbit looks at the moon with everyone~♪ Hop~ Hop~♪ wait, h-huh? Shinobu-san? Since when have you been there?"
"Just no, Bunny Girl. Hop~ Hop~" with that, I greeted her half teasingly, whereupon Luna quickly turned bright red and hastily shook both her hands, explaining.
"Th- This is a really popular game at the nursery school right now. When I picked up Elni-chan today, the boys called me 'Cow woman' and I thought I could get along with the children if I played a game together with them, so Elni-chan gave me special—"
"…Hop~ Hop~"
"Sh- Shinobu-san! Why are you laughing? Please listen properly!"
Luna turned even redder. It wasn't good to tease her too much. But these shaking breasts. The kids wouldn't call her "Miss Boobie" once she got along with them, would they?
While I feared that a bit, I casually shifted my gaze, whereupon there was a fancy bracelet laying on top of the heating table.
…I had seen a similar one before. Was it after the quarrel with the Old Man Bram during Machina's student council election? I remembered Elni saying something about "It's a charm that protects against a devil's influence" and was making lots of them.
While I recalled that, suddenly the words of the Old Man's words floated in the back of my mind.
—This time I wasn't just indebted to you, but to Elni for various things as well. So I have to listen to a request of hers now. I'll make it up to you after that.
—Be nice to Elni too. She's a really… lonely girl.
Scraps of words that the Old Man told me after Machina's election speech. Elni's request to the Old Man. Until now, I had nearly forgotten about it. But I got the feeling that it was alright to forget about it. Elni had changed a bit recently.
Nowadays when Elni came home, she embraced Luna, who came to greet her with a smile. And when we came home, she welcomed us

with a smile like Luna… and embraced everyone of us. I really believed that Elni had changed. Since the day I came to pick her up at the nursery school, she sometimes clung to me from behind. Just like right now.
After apologizing to Luna for teasing her, I got out into the garden and devoted myself to my martial arts exercises. During that, Elni brought my mother with her for some reason and both of them sat down on the lawn, closing their mouths and watching me in silence.
Elni's silver hair fleetingly appeared in the corner of my vision. Bathed in the evening sun, that hair sparkled in a madder red and I was inadvertently captivated, so I stopped my exercise and turned my head around.
"Ehm, what are you two doing?"
"Mh? Watching your practice. You move really beautiful, so I don't grow tired of watching it."
"I think it's you, who one can watch forever."
While replying to Elni with partly true feelings, I shifted my gaze to my mother next.
"And you, Mom?"
"—Watching your practice. You move really beautiful, so I don't grow tired of watching it."
"What the? Imitating Elni? It's not the least bit cute."
I threw her some slightly harsh words as a joke, but surprisingly enough, she showed no signs of being angry and smiled faintly, turning her tone softly.
"But it really was a nice exercise. Both your moves and aura have changed. Until just recently, you tried to imitate your dad or grandfather, so you needlessly worked yourself up, which made your movements and aura stiff, yet now your shoulders are nicely relaxed. Like Elni had said… You might have grown stronger."
Maybe Elni brought my mother here to show her my change. Hearing my mother's words, Elni animated her voice proudly.
"See, just like I told you. Not so long ago I was a bit worried too, but Shinobu got stronger while keeping his kindness. Right now he's really cool!"
"…You sure love Shinobu too, Elni."
Widened her eyes a bit in surprise, my mother continued with a surprised "But".

“I didn’t know you were worrying about him. Sure, it’s worrying how he’s always straining himself, but I’m more worried about Nazuna instead.”
“Yeah, since Nazucat has a lot of talent.”
Elni nodded agreeing with my mother. But I didn’t get it at all, so I doubtfully interjected into their conversation.
“Ehm, having talent isn’t really troubling, is it?”
“Of course it isn’t when it’s at a level, where you can enjoy looking at it. But when you see talent that takes your breath away, most people tend to draw a line with the word ‘Genius’, get envious of what they don’t have and selfishly hate or resent that someone, even though they don’t know the troubles behind it.”
I got the feeling that I somehow understood the meaning behind Elni’s words.
“And the opposite is even worse. Once they only see your talent, admire you and want to catch up, you can no longer be friends. You won’t be family anymore. You’ll be a lonely deity.”
…Lonely. Sadness filled Elni’s words. My mother, as that made her recall something, clouded her expression a bit with a sigh.
“My husband told me in the past: ‘I kept running ahead without knowing the weakness of others… and before I knew it, I was all alone.’ Just like my husband, Nazuna is needlessly strong, yet so frail at the same time. A strength that doesn’t go along with weakness is only dangerous…”
“Tomoe-san, Nazucat will be fine though.”
To deny my mother’s worries, Elni let her tone brim over with feelings.
“Nazucat knows of other’s weakness. She even knows the meaning of strength. She’s always been watching you two. Seeing Shinobu’s small back growing bigger before her eyes, she’s thinking that she wants to become like that too, isn’t she?”
Softly shifting her gaze towards me, she continued her words with “Besides”.
“Nazucat has you by her side, Shinobu. So she’ll be fine. It may be that you’re envious of her too. It may be hard to see a talent in Nazucat that you don’t have. But you won’t come to hate her. You’ll always be her big brother. While that’s only natural, it’s also something quite amazing, in my opinion.”

Like praying for someone else's growth,
"…It's limitless if you look above or below yourself. What's important is the middle. To look at yourself. You were able to do that, Shinobu. You learnt how to do that…"
Still facing me, Elni smiled affectionate with "So I'm really happy".
—What's important is the middle. To look at yourself.
—You're fine as you are, Shinobu.
Elni's words right now overlapped with the feeling that Machina conveyed to me the other day… I could finally realize my own change. Most likely I had been able to move on my heart from my father and grandfather, who I had been so fixated on, and finally take a look at myself.
Probably due to that, my mother suddenly stood up from the lawn and looked at me.
"You really have changed. I also had some training to a certain extent, so I could somewhat tell by seeing your exercises just now. Without me knowing… you have become even stronger than me. I knew this would happen, but I'm surprised how fast it happened…"
Still looking at me, my mother filled her tone with warmth.
"Actually, ever since you returned to your grandfather's doujo, I always thought that you would definitely become strong. That you would surpass me one day and become even stronger than your father."
"…I never expected these words. I mean, I vented my anger about my own weakness on you. So why did you have such expectations for me…?"
"Isn't it obvious?"
Coming closer to me, my mother declared strongly.
"Because you're my son I'm so proud of." with these words, my mother peacefully reached out her hand and started to gentle pet my head. Proud, happy… and pleased about my growth.
Her hand was really warm. I remembered being petted like this as a kid. I was a bit embarrassed, but without forcing myself away from her, I recalled the old days, whereupon Elni suddenly said "…Having a mother is nice" isolated from over on the lawn where she was watching over us.
"Somehow, when I looked at you, Tomoe-san, I was reminded of my mother again. Though my mother wasn't as strong as you, was

clumsy and didn't keep her promises…"
With a soft and radiant dearness,
"But she really resembled you, Tomoe-san, in the way she smiled gently, was easily moved to tears and loved her own child."
Contrary to her boasting intimation,
"She was a really good mother. So I wanted to make her smile more, instead of only making her cry. I wanted to get my head petted like Shinobu…"
Contrary to her unwavering tone, I could only sense sadness from her expression. And seeing Elni like that, my mother slowly got onto the lawn.
"Hey Elni… Your mother's already gone?"
"Yes. She died while crying. It happened a long time ago."
Elni showed an indifferent smile, but she trembled her voice, whereupon my mother nodded a "I see…" quietly, slowly reaching out her hand towards her.
"Elni, if you like—"
Then it looked like my mother was going to tell her something important, but Elni hastily raised a "Ah!" voice, as to suddenly change the current atmosphere, then stood up with attitude for whatever reason.
"Argh! Flashlights! I forgot to tell Kaorun about it!"
A voice way too loud for a monologue. As it was either really important or due to my mother's clouded expression, Elni acted brightly with "I'll call her" and right away went from the lawn into the house. Her back at that time looked really small for some reason…

Right after dinner, Elni rushed through the open door of the living room with "A mail from Hijiri! They'll come pick up us with the car now!" and her cell phone in one hand, probably returning to her room. Then she returned wearing a coat and holding a plastic model in her hand now.
However, as soon as Elni declared everyone in the living room "I'm going stargazing with Shinobu, Hijiri and Kaorun!", she hurriedly rushed to the front door while still smiling.
Using her winner privilege from the game tournament, Elni made a promise to go watch the stars tonight with Hijiri and Kaorun. I was going to tag along too, but it hadn't even been a minute since Hijiri's mail arrived. They wouldn't be here this far, would they?

But I was sure that she couldn't suppress her anticipation. I thought that I should wait together with Elni for Hijiri and Kaorun then, so just like Elni, I went to the front door after I put on my coat in my room.
It must have been the plastic model she had been holding earlier. Elni put up the model on top of the shoe locker at the front door with a smile and I casually looked at it.
"Reminds me, that's the one you wanted to present Machina the other day, but got rejected?"
"Yeah, so mean, right? I mean, it's so cool. But it's fine. From today on it'll protect the Nanjou Household's front door. Because I graduated from being a personal guard. I'm busy with my job at the nursery school. It'll be the successor to Mad Dog."
Elni touched the plastic model really gentle, yet a bit sad for some reason with "I'm counting on you". On the other hand, I shifted my gaze to the model on the shoe locker again and knitted my eyebrows a bit.
For Elni's successor it got a rather unsociable face…

…We really might need flashlights later on.
As we were at the foot of a mountain right now, it was still only half-dark. The lights of the cars that passed by sometimes were appreciated too. But the trees besides the trail would probably block off the light from the stars while we aimed for the top of the mountain, making our footing dangerous.
Still, I knew we were going stargazing, but I wouldn't have expected to take place on top of a mountain. By the way, I heard about the mountain climbing when I waited with Elni for Hijiri and Kaorun.
That said, Hijiri surely heard it from Elni beforehand. She properly wear jerseys fitting for walking on a mountain path. But as for Kaorun, even though we were going to climb a mountain now… she was wearing her usual maid clothes for some reason.
A bit worried, I pointed out "Isn't a skirt too risky?", but Kaorun said some nonsense of "I am a perfect maid, so it is alright" with a strangely convincing tone. With her driving, we sat in the rocking car for various minutes. After parking the car at the parking lot near the foot of the mountain, we right away headed for the mountain trail leading the top.
During that, Hijiri and I each got a flashlight, as Elni and Kaorun apparently brought a couple with them, then we started our mountain

climbing together. Elni, the vanguard, excitedly proceeded with swift steps and Hijiri, following after her, warned her reserved.
“Elni, it’s dark here, so it’s dangerous to hurry too much.”
“I’m used to the mountains, so it’s okay. Besides, I came here a lot in the past. I’m confident that I can reach the top with my eyes closed! Since it’s a straight path!”
“Ah, Elni! It’s really dangerous if you run! Please slow down a bit!”
Even while warning her, Hijiri rushed after Elni, who had fallen in a small jog. Before I noticed it, I had been left all alone with Kaorun.
“…To be together with you, Shinobu-sama, in a place like this makes me feel in danger.”
“That’s what I should be saying, Perverted Maid!”
“No, no, I have all the right to say it. This is you we are talking about, Shinobu-sama. Surely you take advantage of the darkness to push me down forcefully while saying ‘Hah, Hah. These two won’t be back for a while. What do you say, Kaoru, let’s use this chance to make some bonding between Master and Maid. No one’s looking now’—”
“Kaorun, sorry to interrupt your fun, but I’m going on ahead.”
I was a bit worried about Hijiri and Elni. For now I ignored Kaorun’s delusions, whereupon
“…Shinobu-sama, you will not be able to be this cold for long.”
After showing a somewhat sulking expression, she grabbed the hem of her skirt with one hand, fleetingly illuminating her beautiful legs with the flashlight in her hand.
While the alluring light poured on her long legs and soft and white thighs, Kaorun directed a lascivious smile at me with “Does it excite you?”. But I suppressed my true feelings and along with the behaviour of smoking a cigarette, I cracked a cold smile with “—And?”.
In that moment, Kaorun started to get sulky right away.
“What kind of reaction is that? That is way too cold. What do you think I went out of my to wear these maid clothes for? It was all to please your maid fetish, Shinobu-sama!”
“Say what? I don’t really have a maid fetish, you know? More importantly, shouldn’t we hurry after Elni and Hijiri? I’m worried about them.”
“…Even though you are all alone with me, you are only thinking about Hijiri-chan and Elni-san. Ignoring the maid, I see. Fine. If that

is the attitude you want to take, I have an idea."
Huh? Was she pouting? Or was it her usual joke?
I couldn't really tell with Kaorun. While I was a bit bewildered, she turned her back to me, put one hand on the trunk of a nearby tree and took a posture of lightly pushing out her bottom.
…What was up with this sexy pose?
I was a bit doubtful, whereupon Kaorun, whatever she was thinking, slowly pulled up the hem of her skirt with her free hand while still pushing out her bottom towards me, and my vision fell onto well-formed hips clad in bewitching black panties.
"…H- Hey, stop it, Kaorun. What're you doing?"
"Fufu, it does not excite you being with me, right? Just ignore me with your cigarette play again like earlier."
Indifferent to my agitation, Kaorun smiled at me bewitching and pushed out her bottom even more to show it off to me.
Her defenceless exposed hips. While shaking them lascivious to the left and right and bouncing them up and down, Kaorun faced me teasing.
"If you are willing to apologize for your cold attitude, Shinobu-sama…"
Sexily stopping her words, Kaorun continued with a long breath.
"this older girl here will make you feel real good with her bottom."
Pretty much like putting on some kind of performance, Kaorun let her waist writhe. Matching to her movements, her plump hips trembled lovely like pudding as if they were tempting me.
"Please hurry up and apologize. Then I will let you fondle my bottom. You are allowed do whatever you want with my bottom, you know?"
Drawing fascinating circles with her voluminous bottom, Kaorun lightly flushed her cheeks.
"Shinobu-sama, I guess that I should take off my underwear too, right? Then you will understand my charm better, right? Would you be kind enough to… please take off my panties?"
A bewitching sweet mumbling. A lascivious glance with sexy flushed cheeks. On top of that, the light of a car, randomly passing-by nearby, brightly illuminated Kaorun's seductive acting.
It was possible that it was a prank. It was Kaorun after all. I got the feeling she would tell me "Please do not take my joke seriously. I will report you." with a straight face if I screwed up.

However, my reasoning was disordered so much that I could no longer retort. Surely her bottom had a perfect tension and pleasant elasticity… No, no, not good. When I unconsciously couldn't remove my eyes from the beautiful bottom anymore, an unexpected sound of a branch breaking resounded rather loud through the surroundings.
…I felt someone's presence. As Kaorun noticed it too, she stiffened her expression in no time and together with her, I faced the direction the sound came from, whereupon my worry came true.
In the field of our visions were Elni and Hijiri. Elni made a somewhat awkward face, whereas Hijiri was half-crying. And seeing that, Kaorun hastily fixed her attire and pitched up her voice a bit due to her agitation.
"Ehm, since when have you two been there…?"
"…I'm sorry, Kaoru-san. I didn't know at all that you two were in such a relationship. I came back worried about you, but I guess I interrupted you. Sorry!"
"No, no! You have the wrong idea, Hijiri-chan! I was just playing a joking prank! Shinobu-sama was so cold, so I just thought that I would make him understand the charm of an older girl!"
Hijiri turned around and ran away with attitude. Kaorun hastily chased after her. In regards, Elni, somehow guessing the circumstances from Kaorun's words, wordless rested her hand on my shoulder in sympathy.
However, to think such an happening would occur before we even got to stargaze…
I was about to leak a sigh, but around the time I reached the top of the mountain in chase of the two girls, Hijiri's misunderstand was already resolved and Kaorun had returned to her usual composed self, so my earlier sigh completely turned into a long breath.
On top of the mountain. There spread a manmade plaza void of any trees, as they had been cut down. And above us spread the fascinating starry sky. This was amazing…
It was completely different from what I had been looking up to before. Stars as far as you could see in all four directions and no other lights. I felt like I could touch the stars if I reached out my hand and was floating in the air myself. It might be an exaggeration, but it was like I was out in outer space.
It surely was the same for the others. Hijiri looked up to the stars

with sparkling eyes and Kaorun leaked a spellbound breath in an usual agitation. Still fascinated by the starry sky as well, I sat down on the spot for now.
There the nearby Elni cheerfully sat down in my lap and nodded satisfied. Seeing that, Hijiri shifted her gaze away from the starry sky and timidly opened her mouth.
“Uhm, Elni, why are you doing something so enviabl— *cough* why are you sitting down there?”
“You need to ask? Because Shinobu’s lap is my special seat.”
“Yes, indeed. Shinobu-sama’s lap is Elni-san’s special seat, Hijiri-chan.”
“Kaoru-san agreed readily!?”
While Hijiri widened her eyes a bit, Kaorun clung onto my arm so that her beautiful breasts were rubbing against it as soon as she sat down on my left. And following Kaorun’s lead, Hijiri too pressed her comfortable breasts onto my right arm with a soft touch, albeit reserved. Moreover, I felt the sweet elasticity of Elni’s bottom on my lap.
Receiving all these sensations, a great agitation started to gradually grow in my heart and I fell silent from the nervousness, whereupon Kaorun said isolated while we all watched the stars.
“…Seeing such a pretty and broad starry sky in front of my eyes seems to make my worries appear so trivial.”
“Your worries? Oh? You mean how you make others worry?”
“Yes, forgive me for always worrying you with my worrisome body— is what I would like to say, but to my regret, that is not the case.”
As really had something to worry about, Kaorun dropped her voice a bit.
“I believe that I already told you about it a while ago, but soon a new maid will come to our household. Most likely that person will live with us starting next year. But actually… I am a bit worried.”
…The new maid, huh. Like Kaorun had said, I had heard about it before.
The head of the Gogyou Household, Sougo-san had decided to hire a new maid, so that Kaorun could concentrate on studying, since she was allowed to attend university together with Hijiri. However, Kaorun somewhat clouded her expression, as something was worrying her, and I called out to her as soft as possible.

“Kaorun, I’m always there to listen to your worries. If you want, I’ll help you out.”
I hope that I could cheer up Kaorun even a bit. With that in mind, I told her my feelings, whereupon
“…Then I will consult with you during the winter break, Shinobu-sama.”, giving only these profound words, Kaorun fell silent, as she didn’t want to say more, and once again started to gaze at the stars. While we others followed her lead, Elni suddenly started to look alternating at Hijiri and Kaorun’s face.
“Hey, you both look really happy, but could it be, it’s your first time here?”
“Yeah. This wonderful place is a first for both Kaoru-san and me.”
“Sougo never told you about it?”
“My father? No, I don’t think so… Why so suddenly?”
Not replying to Hijiri’s question, Elni smiled faintly with “…He’s so virtuous” and continued.
“You know, this is a memorial place to me and actually my treasure. So I wanted to show it to Shinobu and… give my treasure to both of you, Hijiri, Kaoru.”
“Kaoru-san and me? Are you sure? It’s your treasure, right?”
“Yeah, since it’s you two. I love you both, so I want to give it to you. Besides, Sougo told me about this place, you know?”
Gently narrowing her eyes yearning, Elni looked up the stars once again.
“’Elni, this place was my one and only treasure. But it’s different now. I don’t need this place as a retreat anymore. So I’m giving my treasure to you, Elni. I won’t tell anyone else about it. It’ll only belong to you. If you ever want to pass it on to someone like me, then don’t hesitate about it’— That’s what he said to me.”
“My father said such a thing to you?”
Even while widening her eyes a bit, Hijiri opened her mouth remembering with “Reminds me,”
“When we first met, you knew about exorcist and that the Gogyou Family uses flames to exorcise. Did my father tell you all that?”
“Yeah. Because we’re friends. He even taught me how to use talismans. He’s a really precious friend and in the past I listened to some worries of his, so when I met you, Hijiri, and came to know that you’re his daughter, I was actually really happy.”

Once again facing Hijiri and Kaorun, Elni showed a bright smile.
“The once so lonely Sougo now has two wonderful daughters. I also heard that he got a cool son. So I think Sougo will be happy and able to smile from now on, even without me… It made me really happy.”
Conveying her heartfelt feelings, Elni softly rested her small hand on Hijiri’s shoulder.
“Your father resembles Shinobu a bit. Even though he was continuously called a failure, he’s a strong person that never gave up, kept working hard and became the head of the Gogyou Family.”
“…My father, a failure?”
“I bet you didn’t know. But strong as he is, Sougo will be reliable. So when you succeed the head position of the house, Hijiri, I’m sure Sougo will always help you if you’re in trouble.”
While smiling, Elni stared at Hijiri.
“You tend to take things upon yourself, Hijiri. Rely on others in difficult times, okay? You have Shinobu, Kaorun, Sougo, Luna and the others by your side. If you’re too reckless yourself, Shinobu will be angry, you know? Be careful from now on, okay?”
“Fufu, I don’t want Shinobu-kun to get angry, so I’ll do as you say, Elni. I’ll properly rely on others. Thanks for worrying about me, Elni. But why are you telling me that all of a sudden?”
“Somehow I was remembering the past, so I wanted to say it.”
Pretty much like overflowing with emotions, Elni brightened her smile, then slowly shifted her gaze to Kaorun now and changed her tone into a very kind one.
“You have a changed a bit from when I first met you, Kaorun. I think you have become more charming. You smile more often now and I really love seeing your smile.”
“I am grateful already for the words alone, but the fact that I could change is thanks to you as well, Elni-san.”
Not joking around like usually, Kaorun’s tone was really peaceful.
“Do you remember that time, Elni-san?”
“Mh? What time?” with that, Elni titled her head, whereas Kaorun softly replied with “I mean the summer vacation” and continued her words while smiling brightly.
“I ran away from my exorcist training, got sheltered at the vacation home of Shinobu-sama’s grandfather and we watched the fireworks

of the festival. After that I spoke about my mother and you recommended me to go see my mother."
…Kaorun was with the exorcist organisation ever since she could remember. For a long time, she was treated as a tool by the organisation and believed that her own mother had abandoned her.
Elni urged her to go see her own mother.
As she was remembering that time, Kaorun turned her gaze back to the starry sky.
"I still remember all the words you have told me even now, Elni-san."
With still a peaceful tone, she repeated Elni's words.
—Humans are bound to die one day. You don't know if that will happen tomorrow or in a year. This might sound extreme, but you might not ever see her again if you don't meet her tomorrow. If you have something to ask of her, it's better that you hear the truth from her mouth.
You also have Hijiri. You have a proper place to return to, Kaorun. Don't pay any mind to what others say. Just believe in Hijiri's words, that you are her family—
Dearly retelling the sentiment she had received, Kaorun smiled like a blooming flower.
"Thanks to your push on my back, I mustered the courage to meet my mother. In fact, I came to understand various things by talking with my mother, which allowed me to change a bit, in my opinion. Back then, I was occupied with myself, so I could not say it until now, but…"
Slowly stopping her words, Kaorun smiled at Elni.
"Elni-san, thank you so much for pushing my back and taking on this hard role, even though it brought you close to tears. I am really happy to have a wonderful person like you as my friend. I also love seeing your smile."
"…If you're happy, Kaorun, that's all I need. Because you're my precious friend too. Even while you're joking around, you're supporting the others from the back. You're working hard so that everyone has fun. I'm the one thanking you, Kaorun."
Elni's expression… was a bit different from usual.
Different from her usual bright smile, her expression with an intimate faint smile and her eyes narrowed, looked somewhat mature.
Keeping that expression, Elni slowly stood up from my lap, reached

out her hand and declared gentle while petting Kaorun's head.
"I hope that one day you can fawn on your own mother, Kaorun. I'm sure she'll be happy… if you properly call her 'Mother'."
Elni's heartfelt words. I got the feeling that a small envious was resounding within them. However I had no time to ponder about it, as Elni widely spread both her arms, then tightly embraced Hijiri, Kaorun and me, blossoming a smile like a flower like that.
"I'm glad I came here today with you all. I'm really glad I could present this to Hijiri and Kaorun. I love all three of you."
It was a short embrace. Elni let us go right away, turned on her heel and then spun around with both her arms spread like dancing under the starry sky.
"This is kinda nice. I'm really happy."
Elni kept dancing under the broad sky.
Animating her voice, she danced relaxed and really brilliant…
Her every single move looked really adorable to me. I wanted to watch the dancing Elni forever. Surely Hijiri and Kaorun felt the same as me.
Both of them had their mouths closed, showed a soft smile and watched over Elni. What I felt in my chest at this time was a really common, cheap happiness. However, I considered it something very precious, so
"—Let's come here together again, Elni."
Like making a promise, I declared so to Elni.
But as my voice didn't reach her or she *pretended not to hear it*, Elni didn't gave a reply. Instead, she clung to me again after her charming dance, not letting go that easily this time…

♥♥!

The winner privilege from the game tournament. It was the day after Elni used it without hesitation to go stargazing with Hijiri and Kaorun. Since it was a holiday, Elni took the train to the city two stations away early in the morning with Luna, Machina, Nazuna and me in tow.
In that city, stopping by the cinema, enjoying some karaoke…
…Spending the day together without doing anything special, it was

just a common holiday.
But it might be something incredible pleasant. From time to time, Elni took pictures of us with her digital camera, not breaking her smile even once. But time went by in no time while we played around together, and sadly enough Luna had a shift in the evening, so we regretfully parted with her, then visited a cat café near the station with the remaining members.
With Luna gone, we others entered together, whereupon all kind of cats were roaming free inside the café. On the right was the space for tables. On the left were tools to play with the cats. It mostly was a place, where people came to play with cats.
For now I got us a table and while Elni talked with the Miss from the reception with the digital camera in one hand, the cat-loving Nazuna obviously sparkled her eyes, but so did Machina, who was a surprising animal lover too.
“Meow, meow!”
“Meow, meow— *cough*. Hold it, Nazuna. No running in the café.”
Nazuna dashed away in a happy mood. Machina got hooked on by her for a moment, but then played the older sister along with a cough. But Nazuna couldn’t hold back her excitement and got along with two nearby cats right away, whereas Machina too hurried over to the cats with a smile. However,
“Eh? H- Huh? Why?”
Strangely enough, the moment Machina came closer, most of the cats quickly left the spot.
Most likely Machina considered it only a coincidence at first. Still smiling, she once again approached the cats, but they all escaped and seeing that, Elni spoke to the nearby cats with “Meow, meow” for whatever she was thinking.
Upon that, the cats too meowed like replying to Elni, making it seem like a conversation. No, not seem like, they actually might have a proper conversation.
…Reminded me, during summer vacation, when we took care of my friend Asada’s dog Momo, Elni said something about “I’m a Goddess! Of course I can talk with animals!” while having a happy conversation with the dog.
When I remembered about that time, Machina dropped her shoulders and came back in downhearted state.

“Hey Shinobu, none of the cats are playing with me. Why’s that? I mean, they’re all over Nazuna. Did I do something to make them hate me?”
“W- Well, what can I say…”
Unable to find words to console her, I was stuck for an answer, whereas Elni seemingly finished her talk with the cats. She held a three-coloured cat against her chest and then softly called out to Machina.
“Machina, I think this one will play with you.”
“…Really? She won’t run away or hiss at me?”
“It’ll be fine. She seems interested in you.”
Elni gentle handed over the cat with “Hold her” and Machina held the cat against her voluminous chest in a doubtful state. Upon that, the cat didn’t run away, just like Elni had said, and happily snuggled up to her, so Machina’s expression brightened up instantly.
“Shinobu, can we take her home?
“…Don’t lay hands on the shop’s girls.”
Well, I could relate to her, but I advised Machina lightly and sat down at the nearby table.
Machina still held the three-coloured cat against her chest, whereas Nazuna came back with three cats in tow and both girls sat down at each my sides. By the way, Machina started to purr an adorable “meow, meow” together with Nazuna, as she was happy that the cat had warmed up to her. As for Elni, she pulled out the digital camera from her pocket again and took pictures of us with a smile.
…I should let her show me the pictures later on.
When I thought about that, a cat with white fur came trudgingly over to me and started to purr happily, so I softly picked up that white cat.
…This reminded me of our own cat Kagari. But she was the rather jealous type, so she might get angry about me touching another cat like this.
While I was reminiscing about our own cat, the cat I was holding brought her face closer and licked my cheek silky. Ohh, just like Kagari’s, her tongue was rough. Getting nostalgic, I tickled the cat under the chin for now, whereupon Machina looked over for some reason, puffed up her cheeks a bit and softly pushed the cat I was holding aside, then

“…*kiss*… Mm…”
Not only did she suddenly kiss me near my mouth, she also imitated the cat and licked my cheek reserved. Ohh, quite different from the cat. Her lips were so soft that my heart was about to be stolen. The smooth tip of her tongue. While I was about to get intoxicated by these sensations, I hastily opened my mouth in surprise.
“M- Machina, what’re you doing in public?”
“…Just some physical contact.”
For that, her cheeks were rather red and she faced sideways somewhat sulking.
There Elni took a break from taking pictures and faced Machina with a giggle.
“Fufu, Machina got a bit jealous of the cat.”
“Yes, because she did something enviable to him— wait, what’re you saying out of the blue, Elni! I’m not jealous or anything! Don’t get the wrong idea, Shinobu!”
“…Yeah, I know. It’s okay, Machina. I understand everything.”
“What’s with that plastic face! You don’t get it at all!”
Exposed after all, huh. Unable to hold back any longer, I burst out in a laughter, whereupon Machina turned bright red while repeating “I’m not jealous or anything” just in case. On a spontaneous look during that, all cats within the shop were gathering at Elni’s feet for some reason.
Each of the cats raised a meow, which looked pretty much like they wanted Elni to play with them. But Elni scratched her cheek with the digital camera in one hand and replied to the cats with a bittersweet smile.
“Mhm~ Sorry, but I’m busy with my pictures right now. If you want to play, go to Shinobu or the other— wait, Uwah. What’s up so suddenly? Hey, stop it.”
Not listening to Elni’s reprimand, the cats got on Elni’s shoulders and head one after another and the circle of cats gradually grew bigger…
A truly heart-warming scene. At some point, the other customers were chasing her with their eyes too and Nazuna, who had only eyes for the cats so far, shifted her gaze to Elni, animating her voice with a smile for whatever she was thinking.
“Hey Elni-chan, Machina-oneechan, we’re actually keeping a cat at

our house too, you know? She's called Kagari-chan. She's with dad on his business trip right now, but I think she'll come back for the new year, so I'll introduce you then."
"…I hope I won't get hated."
"It, It'll be fine. Sure, Kagari-chan gets angry when some unknown girl gets along with Brother, but as long as you don't cling to him or kiss him, you'll probably be fine."
"Th- That's not fine at all! So when that cat comes home, she'll get angry every time I or my sister cling to Shinobu or kiss him, right?"
Instantly clouding her expression, Machina turned teary with "I'll definitely get hated!" and Nazuna quickly averted her eyes, shifting her gaze towards Elni for help.
"O- Oh, right. Elni-chan, you can talk with cats too, right? So could you mediate between Machina and Kagari-chan once she gets home?"
"Well, I don't mind…"
Nodding somewhat enunciating, Elni started to take pictures again midway in her sentence to dodge the question. On the other hand, I felt doubtful, but looked at Elni's digital camera to change the topic.
"…It might be too late, but are you even allowed to take picture here?"
"Fufu, no problem, Shinobu. I properly received permission from the Miss at the reception earlier."
Elni made a V-sign as if to say no worries. Speaking of, when we entered the café, she was talking with the Miss from the reception about something. Elni was surprisingly clever…
A bit surprised, I looked at Elni's digital camera again.
"Still, you're taking a lot of pictures lately. I guess you're really mimicking Kaorun?"
"…Guess so. Kaorun said so as well, memories fade easily. But if you keep them in the form of pictures, you can see everyone's smile any time. So with these pictures, I can already…"
Just what… would follow after these words? Elni closed her mouth and smiled somewhat sadly while dearly stroking over her digital camera.
…At that time, something suddenly felt amiss. But no one noticed it's true character, nor paid any attention to it and after enjoying the cat café to the fullest, we left the café together.

However it might have been not enough for her. Elni suddenly invited us with “Let’s play some more” and urged by her, we went to a arcade center or window shopping… We enjoyed the holiday more than enough.
During that, only Elni was being reluctant about returning home and tried to play together with everyone as much as the time allowed it, as if today was the last time to do so.
Moreover, after we got home, Elni started to prepare dinner together with Machina and Nazuna instead of Luna, who had left for her part-time job. Furthermore, after dinner Elni now played a video game in the living room together with Machina and Nazuna, staying near everyone unnaturally often today.
While seeing her like that, that small amiss feeling I had earlier at the cat café gradually swelled up and after I got out of the bath, I headed to the living room to check upon the others.
Upon that, there were Elni, Machina and Nazuna on the sofa in the living room. They must have been tired from playing around. Machina and Nazuna were nodding off, whereas Elni gave them a lap pillow.
Elni started to affectionately pet each their heads, which pretty much made her appear like their older sister.
…I felt bad about disturbing them. I was about to close the door at once, but
“Listen to me like that, you two. I have something important to tell you.”
Suddenly Elni’s gentle and serious voice resounded. Inadvertently I stopped my hand that had grabbed the door knob. Elni peacefully narrowed her eyes and slowly spun her words.
“I’m sure you’ll be able to live in the human world from now on, Machina. So you can be at ease. Be more honest to yourself. Act more spoiled. Everyone should allow it. But make sure to return the favour in some way, when you act spoiled, okay? Just remember that.”
“…Yes… I understand… But today… you’re kind strange, Elni…”
As she was already half-asleep, Machina replied quietly with her eyes still closed, whereupon Elni smiled softly and then shifted her gaze towards Nazuna.

“This is just a guess, but do you want to become like Shinobu, Nazucat?”
“Yeah… That’s right… Because Brother is so cool… I love him…”
“Then watch him even closer than you have until now, Nazucat. Your horizon should broaden when you see the weakness, kindness and strength of someone without talent.”

“That’s rather… complicated… I don’t really get it…”
“You don’t have to get it for now. But please don’t forget it. You have a talent that Shinobu lacks. Even so, the world of a genius is rather narrow and frail in a way. I’m sure you’ll be fine, but if you want to become truly strong, you can’t avert your eyes from Shinobu, okay?”
“Meow…” with that, Nazuna replied quietly while slowing drifting into the dream world, whereupon
“…I have to properly tell it to Luna too…”
Mumbling something with a small voice, Elni opened her mouth while petting their heads again, and started to sing with a warm voice. It was a lullaby from another country. It was a soft melody that seemed to envelop everything. A tone overflowing with dearness that erased my bewilderment and unrest.
Before I noticed it, I had been befuddled by the singing voice and I stood stock still partly absent-minded, whereupon the lullaby ended in time and Elni came into my direction, raising a hysteric “Uwah!” voice as soon as she saw my face in front of the door.
“You surprised me. Since when have you been there, Shinobu? Were you eavesdropping?”
“Ah, no, well… Sorry.”
“Mhm~ No! Today I won’t forgive you, even if you apologize. As punishment, you have to help me carry Machina and Nazuna. If they sleep there, they’ll catch a cold.”
Being told that, I followed Elni’s gaze, where Machina and Nazuna were sleeping soundly together on the sofa. Sure, we couldn’t leave them like that and the punishment Elni spoke of surely was meant as a joke. But the lullaby was affecting me even now and I was still kind of absent-minded while I carried Machina and Nazuna one after another to their beds together with Elni.
After that was done, Elni said “I have to clear it today” to herself and swiftly returned to the living room, as she was planning to continue the video game.
In regards, I watched her leaving, then returned to my own room and lay down on the bed.
…The words Elni told Machina and Nazuna earlier. They sounded just like parting words and the unrest, which had vanished once, came back. Could it be, Elni was still…
Every time I thought so, my unrest grew larger. But it wasn’t certain.

It was possible that I got the wrong idea. It should be alright as it was… I took my time to calm my feelings, then I looked at the clock on the wall of my room and slowly straightened up my upper body on the bed.
Soon Luna would return from her job. Without doubt then, Elni would go greet her with a smile. I wanted to see that close by, so I left my room and headed for the living room, whereupon I ran into my mother midway.
My mother was holding a photo album against her chest and I asked slightly curious.
"…Are you going to send dad our pictures?"
"No. These are the pictures Elni took. She asked me to develop them."
"Hee, is that so…"
Still, even if she was mimicking Kaorun, I didn't know that Elni took enough pictures to fill a whole album. While I gave a short agreeable response, my mother clouded her expression a bit for some reason and turned on her heels, heading to the living room, as she wanted to hand the album to Elni. I followed after my mother, whereupon now Elni was sleeping rolled up on the sofa.
She probably was just as tired as Machina and Nazuna. My mother and I looked at each other and quietly approached Elni while smiling faintly.
"Hey Elni, if you sleep here, you'll catch a—"
Suddenly my own words inadvertently vanished into the air. Most likely my mother had noticed the abnormality too. We both closed our mouths and were at a loss for words.
We had thought Elni was simply sleeping. But that wasn't it. She was having a terrible nightmare and lightly trembled her small body.
"…I'm sorry, Mom."
Along with bitterish words, tears started to run out of her closed eyes and unfamiliar names spilled out of her mouth one after another. And for every time, Elni repeated an apology.
Sorry, Sorry… She repeated that with a cracked voice over and over.
From bewilderment and confusion, both my mother and I held our breath, unable to do anything, and Elni helplessly puttered around in the air with her own hand while making noises during her nightmare.

My mother quietly grabbed that hand, whereupon Elni closed her mouth relieved from the warmth on her palm.
“Good. There you are.”
Tightly squeezing back my mother’s hand, she faintly opened her eyelids.
“Mom, I had a scary dream. Everyone was…”
With her sadly rocking eyes, she was surely looking at something else than here. Her crimson eyes finishing the sad slumber,
“Ahh—”
Elni’s eyes waking up from the dream, quickly lost their colour.
“…..I see. Everyone’s already gone.”
Together with a voice void of emotions, it seemed that her heart creaked noisy. No more words followed. Not even a crying voice came out of her opened mouth, just tears spilled endless out of her eyes… Elni cried silently. But probably because she was in front of us.
She tried to smile to cover it up, but failed and failed over and over and over again with a distorted expression— Unable to endure it, I tightly embraced her.
…Elni has a light sleep. She has trouble falling asleep. She’s often crying in her sleep.
Suddenly Machina’s words floated in the back of my mind. Certainly, when Elni first came here, she had been crying in her sleep too. She had kept weeping while calling out unfamiliar names like just now.
But because she had smiled brightly like always, because she had behaved so in front of everyone, I might have forgotten about it until now. And while I had forgotten it, Elni had been crying like this all the time?
Thinking so, I increased my squeeze onto her.
“…Cry it out, Elni.”
Even while my arms that held her trembled, I squeezed out these words.
“You don’t have to smile all the time. You don’t have to hold yourself back. You can cry in front of us. We’ll always be with you, so… don’t cry by yourself anymore.”
My feelings that I desperately conveyed to her. My arms holding her tightly. How much of my words did reach her in my arms? Without saying anything, Elni entwined her arms around my back. But her

arms were really powerless and after a short embrace, Elni stopped crying right away.
“Ah, already this late!”
Unnaturally shifting her gaze to the clock on the wall of the living room,
“Luna’s coming back soon. Today I’ll go greet her in front of the house!”
Obviously changing the topic, Elni got away from me, passed by my confused mother and rushed out of the living room in an escape.
…Surely it wasn’t like my feelings didn’t reach her. I believed that they were properly conveyed. But Elni properly refused to accept them?
Bit by bit my unrest swelled up again. To suppress it, I pressed my hands onto my chest, whereupon my mother said isolated with a sigh after she watched off the leaving Elni.
“I knew she was strange lately, but in the end, Elni… is different from the others.”
“Different from the others?” with that I asked back, not understanding the meaning behind her words, whereas my mother knitted her eyebrows a bit and replied with holding out the album she was carrying.
“It seems this album is Elni’s new treasure. When she asked me to print out the pictures, she was talking about it happily. But I don’t really get it.”
Get what? Without asking that, I took the album from my mother and slowly turned the pages.
Upon that, starting from the time of the culture festival, the album was full with pictures like from summer vacation, Luna’s birthday, the previous game tournament and today’s cat café.
Ff you keep them in the form of pictures, you can see everyone’s smile any time— Just like Elni had said at the cat café, the smiles of our family and Hijiri or Kaorun filled the album.
But that wasn’t enough. I couldn’t really find the smile I wanted to see. My speed of turning the pages gradually became faster. Impatience grew in my heart and I kept searching by straining my eyes. But the result was the same. I just couldn’t find it.
“…Like you said, I don’t get it either. How is this a treasure?”
Succeeding on my shaking words, my mother continued really

peaceful.
“Yeah, there isn’t a single picture of Elni…”
A whole album of smiles from everyone. Elni’s new treasure. Amidst that, only Elni’s smile, the supposedly important thing was sadly missing.
—In the end, Elni is different from the others.
Actually I started to get it. That amongst everyone, amongst our family, only Elni wasn’t part of it. But I was really scared… about knowing the meaning behind my mother’s words.

♥♥!

When I suddenly woke up, my body was kind of sluggish.
Probably because I didn’t slept much lately due to pondering about a lot. But despite having woken up earlier than usual, I just didn’t feel like going back to sleep.
…Could I do something until Christmas? Elni’s crying face wouldn’t leave my head. The album with just Elni missing. With the resurfaced unrest in my chest, I left my room and casually peeked into the living room, where Nazuna was despite it still being early.
As soon as she noticed me, she gave me the usual energetic morning greeting.
“Morning, Brother! You’re up really early today!”
“Well, I have some stuff going on…”
I gave a vague response, whereupon Nazuna opened her mouth a bit worried.
“Ehm, I don’t really get it, but how about we spar about a bit? I think it’ll give you a change of pace to move your body in some exercises.”
“…Yeah, right. Then let’s train for a bit.”
I should take up Nazuna on her consideration. To change my mood, I quickly opened the terrace door and was about to go out into the garden, whereupon I suddenly heard the chirping of birds.
The serene chirping of the birds. When I threw my glance over there wondering, the wild birds flew away with flapping wings, which was a somewhat wondrous scene.
Elni stood still in the middle of the garden. A few birds gathered

around here and their numbers gradually increased. The wing flapping and chirping of the wild birds filled our garden.
…It was pretty much like a scene from a painting.
The birds weren't begging for anything and might have just wanted to be near Elni. Elni mumbled something and reached out her hands, whereupon the birds fluttered their wings pleased.
With this mysterious scene in front of me, I forgot my words and held my breath, whereas Nazuna boasting said to me with a small voice, as she noticed my behaviour.
"You always wake up so late, so it's your first time seeing this, right? Elni-chan sometimes wakes up earlier and then she plays with the birds like that. It must be wonderful to be able to talk with animals. Elni-chan's really amazing."
"Well, she apparently is a Goddess…"
I gave a somewhat stupid reply, whereas Nazuna continued with "Speaking of Goddess," and a smile.
"The teacher taught us in class the other day that people with silver hair and red eyes like Elni-chan are called Albino. And that it's said that Albinos were worshipped as a target of faith by the locals since ancient times."
"Target of faith, huh. I think I read something similar in a book."
"According to my teacher, I think it was in the southeast of Africa? There they believe that the body of an Albino host a special power. Also, Noah from Noah's arc was also an Albino."
…Noah's arc, huh. It was the arc that appeared in the flood story of the bible. While recalling again what I read in the book, I shifted my gaze a bit surprised to Nazuna.
"But it's rare for you to seriously listen to class."
"Actually I thought it might be related to Elni-chan, so I was curious. But everything besides the Albino stories went in one ear and out the other."
"…You're going to have troubles with the test again."
When I lightly rebuked her so, Nazuna hastily got back on the topic.
"A- Anyway, Brother, when I heard about the Albinos, I thought, is Elni-chan really a Goddess? That would be really amazing if so. A Goddess in our family, you know?"
Family… These normally happy words now evoked a pain in my chest, but I hid that and casually asked.

“Reminds me, you’re calling Luna and Machina with ‘Oneechan’, but you won’t do that for Elni?”
“…I want to, really, but I think it’s no good.”
Knitting her eyebrows a bit, Nazuna dropped her voice a little.
“Before, during Machina-oneechan’s student council election, Elni-chan said that she can’t become Machina-oneechan’s older sister, remember? So I too can’t become her little sister yet. I don’t really get why, but… it’s a bit sad.”
“Elni might be different than the others after all…”
Nazuna might have senses that too. But she considered Elni her family and believed that one day she would become her little sister, so she had used “yet”. At the same time I gave a short agreeable response, I breathed out and somehow renewed my spirit.
“Now then, we’re going to spar, right? Then let’s get started already.”
I dared to brightly urge Nazuna and together we slipped on our sandals, going out into the garden through the terrace door.
In that moment, the wild birds in the garden all at once got away from Elni in surprise as soon as they noticed us, flying away in an escape along with loud flattering of their wings. Amidst that, Elni waved her hands and said good-bye to the birds, then she showed us a smile.
“Morning, Shinobu, Nazucat. Today we’ve great weather, it’s nice. The perfect day to hang up your laundry.”
“You sound like a housewife.” While replying so with a casual tone, I faced Elni again. As expected it was the usual Elni like always. And we knew nothing of her. Machina had said something similar the other day.
We really didn’t know what kind of childhood or what kind of lifestyle she had so far. Just now Nazuna told me about the Albinos being targets of faith, but how was that related to calling yourself a Goddess? I wanted to know more about her, even if it was just a bit.
“Hey Elni, this might come out of the blue, but can I ask a question?”
Staring Elni, I opened my mouth with my mind made up.
“Why do you call yourself a Goddess?”
“…Because everyone desired it.”
“And who are these ’everyone’?”
“The people of my hometown, who I wanted to protect.”

A little vague answer. A soft tone. But Elni's expression… wasn't her usual smile.
"Because everyone desired it, I became a Goddess, no, not quite. It wasn't everyone. Only one didn't desire it. But I never noticed that and couldn't made my most precious person smile… I'm really a useless Goddess."
Lightly shrugging her shoulders, she smiled jokingly with "Stupid, isn't it?", but lightly trembling her shoulders, Elni turned her back to Nazuna and me. She surely wouldn't tell us any more. Still keeping her back to us, she brightly changed the topic.
"Anyway, Shinobu, what's up with you this morning? You're up unusually early."
"Yeah, I just happened to wake up."
Even while I was a bit at a loss for words, I clad myself in composure and replied to Elni.
"But right back at you, you're up quite early too."
"Somehow I was unable to sleep…"
Slowing ending her words, Elni continued with a smile while turning around.
"Because today's my last day at the nursery school."
"…Your last?"
These words irritated my heart and I could tell that my face was becoming a bit stiff.
"Wait a sec, Elni. Why's it the last? You only just got closer to the kids, right? Yet you're planning to quit there?"
"Actually, I was downsized. Finally the recession hit me too— wait, jokes aside. Don't make such a face, you two. It was on a short term anyway. I can't stay for too long. Today… my duty ends."
Elni clouded her expression a bit, whereupon Nazuna, having heard all of it, said with teary eyes.
"…You can't continue with the job? You love the nursery school, don't you? You said the kids are all cute and it's really fun."
"Yeah, right. But there's nothing to be done about it. Anyone can take my place. The only thing I can do now is to give my best at behaving brightly, so that I can part with everyone with a smile. That surely is for the best."
…Were Elni's words only directed at the kids?
Suddenly a cold gust of wind blew like back then, which unsettled my

heart. It felt like she was declaring a parting once again. I had thought she was able to change. I believed that we would become a family. But that might have only been a misunderstanding on my part.
Lately Elni had taught Machina how to cook, went stargazing with Hijiri and Kaorun and went out with Luna and us others… Maybe she did that to not have any regret left?
The unchanged Elni smiled in front of me. But I got the feeling that various emotions were hidden behind her expression and the pain in my heart gradually grew intense.
I could no longer brush off the resurfaced unrest in my chest…

While the evening sun shone through the windows of the dojo at Gogyou Mansion, a sharp noise of wind cutting resounded in the dojo and the various air bullets launched by Machina approached Hijiri with a howl. In regards, Hijiri used a talisman to blow away the shockwaves and took a attentive stance against Machina with her wooden sword.
With class over, it after school. On a rare occasion Machina had no work for the student council today, so she asked Hijiri, who had the day off from the Kendo club too, and now they were training in the dojo of the Gogyou Mansion like this.
—Be kind to everyone. Become strong enough to protect everyone. Then they'll repay the kindness.
The teaching of Machina's mother. Machina tried to become even a bit stronger to live up to it. Even right now, she was training with a serious expression together with Hijiri. As for Kaorun and me, we each watched over them from the corner of the dojo.
By the way, special talismans were put up on the walls of the dojo to compensate Machina's shockwaves. And for some reason, Kaorun happily resting her cheek on my lap.
Kaorun probably just wanted to act spoiled. But I didn't feel like cracking one of my usual jokes and even while I observed Hijiri and Machina's mock battle, my head was full of Elni.
There the door of the dojo opened suddenly and a man with sinewy features showed up.
He was the head of the Gogyou Household and Hijiri's father, Gogyou Sougo-san. Hijiri and Machina stopped their training as soon as they saw him, but
"Just keep going. You don't have to mind me."

Sougo-san replied with a light wave of his hand and he quietly sat down next to me while the girls resumed their practice. Following, Sougo-san cleared his throat with a cough and faced Kaorun, who was enjoying my lap pillow.
“Sorry, Kaoru, but could you bring us some tea?”
“Nope. Please refrain from interrupting my sweet time with Shinobu-sama. You can just pour some tea yourself, Papa.”
Papa? She meant Sougo-san? Before she had called him Master, but it sure had changed into quite the familiar title.
Actually, she was a maid for the most part, so she should work properly. Sougo-san made a wry smile without any real signs of anger, but I dropped my gaze to Kaorun half wearily.
“…Are you really the maid of this Mansion?”
“Rather than of this Mansion, I am only a maid for Hijiri-chan and you, Shinobu-sama. Basically, I will obey no order except from you two. Because it is a bit troublesome.”
“Then I ask you. Please make us some tea.”
“I refuse to. I want to enjoy Shinobu-sama’s lap pillow, so please go in my stead, Papa.”
“…Truth be told, you’re just a pretty girl—- no, a pervert that wears maid clothes only for show, aren’t you?”
“How rude. I was only joking around a bit. I will go prepare some tea right away.”
Stopping the jokes, Kaorun stood up, whereupon Sougo-san interjected softly.
“Kaoru, take your time.”
“I know. You want to talk to Shinobu-sama, right?”
Hey, if you noticed it, then obediently go right from the beginning.
Such thoughts crossed my mind, but surely Kaorun could joke around with a peace of mind, since she had opened up to Sougo-san. Holding back my tactless retort, I shifted my gaze to Sougo-san.
“Still… I’m a bit surprised. She called you Papa.”
“Well, Kaoru is shy. Only once she called me ‘Father’, but she turned bright red then as it was really embarrassing. Since then, she calls me like that. Well, it isn’t all too bad. Even if you only change one’s title, your relationship already changes a bit.”
…The relationship already changes a bit by just changing the title,

huh.
Specially for a complicated relationship like Kaorun and Sougo-san's, this change might be rather big.
The one who killed Kaorun's father was Sougo-san. Sougo-san had always felt indebted to her because of that, so he must be happy about her change. In fact, he somewhat softened his expression and after a short pause, I asked what he wanted.
"So, ehm, you need something from me?"
"Yeah, I have a question for you…"
Saying so just a bit hesitant, Sougo-san filled his tone with indecision.
"How's Elni doing right now?"
"…She's still staying with us and smiling like usual."
When I replied with a heavy tone, Sougo-san only replied "Just like back then" shortly and sighed somewhat sad. It could be that… Sougo-san noticed long ago that Elni would leave this city.
Previously, when we held a meeting at the Gogyou Mansion for Machina's election, Sougo-san had mentioned that Elni was his precious friend and that he wanted to have dinner with her. Afterwards he actually treated her to dinner and even complied with her request.
…Elni's request. That was to make the exorcist organisation tolerate Machina, a hybrid devil, who were regarded dangerous by the organisation. For that request, Sougo-san even risked his own position within the organisation and simply took it straight on.
Sure Sougo-san decided to grant the request of his dear friend because he predicted Elni's leaving, because it might be the last request from her. Noticing it only now, I bit down on my lips, whereas Sougo-san quietly declared to me at the same time he made a sigh.
"Nanjou-kun, you might have already noticed, but if you have anything to tell her, then you better hurry up. Very soon, Elni will—"
"I haven't given up on her."
Cutting into his words, I made my tone decisive.
"Just now you told me that a relationship changes by from a different way of calling each other. I only thought of it just now, but I'll make use of your words."
"…I see. Good luck." with that, he replied with a small nod and

smiled somewhat sadly. His faced with his eyes narrowed looked like he would cry any moment, but he didn't spill any tears. A dry expression that gave the impression that it withered a long time ago.
I was sure that Sougo-san had once ended up letting go off Elni in the past…

After Machina's tense training ended, we left the Gogyou Mansion through the front gate while Hijiri and Kaorun sent us off. Saying our good-bye to them, I suddenly stopped and opened my mouth.
"Reminds me, what are you doing for Christmas this year?"
"Oh please, Shinobu-sama. That is a secret just between us, right?"
"First time I hear that. Stop saying misleading things. And stop snuggling up to my chest too."
While retorting to Kaorun, I corrected my tone a bit.
"Actually, I want to hold a Christmas party with *everyone* this year, though I don't have concrete plans yet."
"A sex orgy party just for Christmas?"
"I'm gonna smack you, you perverted maid! I'm trying to be serious here! Actually, why are you turning red on your own foolery?"
"…Because I am aware myself that I failed. Anyway, if you are holding a party, please leave the preparations to me. I will present all of you an extraordinary sweet time for the Christmas night."
Kaorun puffed up her chest full of confidence, but hearing that, Machina said "I'm a bit worried" and I shared her opinion. However, I would leave the preparations to Kaorun. After that, I rounded it up with a quick chit-chat with Hijiri and Kaorun, and while I walked home together with Machina, I crossed my arms.
…The Christmas Party was my last resort. If possible I would like to hold on to Elni without relying on it. So while recalling my conversation with Sougo-san, I started talking to Machina, who was walking next to me, with "Hey Machina, I have something to discuss about Elni." and while I continued with "I'll ask the others for help too", I made a proposal.
Instantly, Machina showed a smile with "I'm sure Elni will be delighted" and when I walked on while exchanging ideas with her, we suddenly came across an unexpected person near our house.
A tall figure. A black suit. The same red hair as Machina. Giving off the aura of a foreign actor, he was Luna and Machina's father, the Old Man Bram.

But he was supposed to be in the demon realm, so just what was he doing here? Surprised by the unexpected meeting, Machina widened her eyes too, whereas the Old Man faced me and declared indifferently.
“Hmp, you look as stupid as ever, Shinobu.”
“…Who said you can drop the honorific? Don’t call my name so casually. I’m gonna smack you, you bloodsucker.”
“E- Excuse me for that— wait, no! You told me to call you so! Oh, maybe your head is actually just a decoration?”
Like that, I got it started with the Old Man, whereupon Machina smiled faintly with “You two are rather close” and then she directed the smile at her father.
“So, why are you here, Father? Do you need something?”
“Well, something like that. It’s for a promise this time.”
“A promise? I don’t really get it, but anyway, if you’re coming here, give me at least a call. What do you think a cell phone is for? And why are you hardly responding to my mails? Also…”
In that manner, Machina started to complain. But she looked a bit happy and the Old Man relaxed his expression too, shifting his gaze towards me after he talked with Machina.
“Shinobu, I got indebted to Elni and you for the incident with Machina. I told you before, but I’m going to listen to Elni’s request now.”
While leaking a sigh for some reason, the Old Man continued with “Sorry…” and turned around.
I had forgotten again… Elni’s request. What was the Old Man going to do from now on? I was concerned about that, but I got the feeling that he told me that Elni forbid him to talk about it. Most likely he wouldn’t answer me even if I asked.
When I silently watched after the Old Man, Machina next to me tilted her head wondering.
“What could Elni’s request be?”
“…I don’t know either.”
But there was something else I was supposed to do instead of worrying about that. While I resume my walk together with Machina, we two kept talking about the plans for the coming event until we reached the house…

Dinner time at our house. At the dinner table was everyone, namely

Machina, Luna, Elni, Nazuna, my mother and I, gathered like usually. Amidst that, I waited for everyone to finish their meal and exchanged looks with my mother. Like arranged with everyone except Elni beforehand, my mother threw a glance at Elni and started the conversation teasingly with “But I have to say,”.
“even though you ate so much today again, you always stay so small, Elni.”
“Muh, why are you looking at my chest for that, Tomoe-san?”
“…I feel a bit sorry for you.”
“Wh- What’s with that pitiful look! What’s wrong with being small! It’s easier to tell your heartbeat with a smaller size! I can even hear Shinobu’s heartbeat when we’re embracing! Better than Luna or Machina ever can!”
It was the usual Elni. She sparsely puffed up her moderate chest and raised her voice.
“Besides, big breasts are big because they’re packed with dreams! And small breasts are small because they grant wishes! Unlike Luna, Machina or Tomoe-san, Nazucat and I are bringing dreams to everyone! Small breasts aren’t to be underestimated!”
“…Nazuna is my daughter, you know? Lately she’s moving from the dream granting side to the dream stocking side, so I’m afraid that Nazuna is no longer your fellow, Elni.”
“N- No way! This can’t be? Tell me it’s not true, Nazucat!”
“Sorry, Elni-chan. I’ll be become an enchantress, so I can’t stand on the same stage as you anymore.”
Somewhat awkward, Nazuna phoned in monotone. In comparison, my mother’s acting was flawless. She said teasing again.
“Somehow, Nazuna already seems more of an older sister than Elni. Nazuna isn’t as stupid as Elni either and got a bigger chest…”
“W- Wait a sec, Tomoe-san! My chest is still bigger! Besides, going by appearance, I’m still the older sister! You think so too, don’t you Nazucat?”
“Sorry, Elni-chan. I have already surpassed you, like a vassal his feudal Lord during the Sengoku period.”
“S- So this is how Oda Nobunaga must have felt at Honno-ji…”
Nazuna phoned in monotone again. In regards, Elni made a heartrending ace, as she received a shock, and sought help from Luna and Machina.

“Luna, Machina, today Tomoe-san and Nazucat are rather cold. Give them a warning, by utilizing your sadistic skill, Luna, and your Queen tendency, Machina.”
“I, I refuse to. Because in my opinion too, you are a child, Elni-chan…”
“I, I agree with my sister. You really appear smaller than Nazuna now.”
With an awkwardness of the same level as Nazuna’s, Luna and Machina both matched their story to my mother’s and Elni finally broke out in tears.
“Shinobu! Everyone’s so mean today! I’m a tiny bit hurt! Say something to them, Shinobu!”
“…I can only say one thing.”
Resting my hands on both sides of Elni’s shoulders, I played my part with a somewhat passionate tone.
“Regain your lost pride with your own strength. If you’re up for it, I’ll stand by your side. How’s it, Elni, are you motivated for it?”
“More than ever. But you’re a bit strange today too, Shinobu…”
I felt a bit guilty and Elni too became a bit doubtful, but well, it was going just like planned. My mother softly clapped my shoulder and left the room, whereas Luna and I stood up from our seats to start the preparations. It certainly might have been a bit forceful this time, but— well, time to start the second contest for the position of the Nanjou family’s second daughter.

Machina, Nazuna and Elni stood in front of the heating table in the living room. Their gazes were fixed on each their call bell, which served as a replacement for a buzzer. All preparations were done.
Just like with the first contest for the position of the Nanjou family’s second daughter, I was the moderator for this tournament and Luna my assistant. After I finished a simple accord with Luna, I watched over the contestants once again and slowly started to talk.
“Okay then, I hereby declare the start of the second contest for the position of the Nanjou family’s second daughter. In the first contest Luna won unintentionally, but this time for sure Luna won’t participate. We’ll properly settle who from you three is the most suited to be an older sister.”
After I confirmed that they all nodded firmly to my words, I continued my explanations.

“The conditions are the same as before. Luna will give you quizzes now. If you know the answer, ring the bell and the fastest one gets to answer. As an extra this time, the winner will receive a wonderful present. Please give your best for the prize.”
Now I wanted to raise the tension, so I raised the volume of my voice a bit.
“Okay! Now to introduce the participants! First we have entry number one, the student president of our school and red-haired Queen, Machina Liebelei Orangelo!”
“Fufu, I’ll play along to kill some time. Well, I’ll win anyway.”
Machina showed a laid-back expression. Just by appearance, she surely was the most suited to be the second daughter.
“Next we have entry number two, the captain of the karate club despite her adorable features and she dreams to become an enchantress, Nanjou Nazuna!”
“Meow! I’ll give my best to become an enchantress! I want to be the fine sake that intoxicates you!”
Well, for now that was surely impossible. Nazuna didn’t look like the second daughter at all.
“Lastly we have entry number three…A simple puppy.”
“Woof, woof— wait, what the! At least call me Mad Dog! Actually, it’s too rude how you only treat me like that, Shinobu! I’ll definitely get your own back!”
Elni was full of motivation. I smiled faintly and threw a glance at Luna, who nodded with a smile and then stated the first question with a beautiful voice like a ringing bell.
“Onto the first question. The sentence Caesar from Rome said when he was assassinated, is really famous, but what did he say?”
Instantly, Nazuna rang the bell in no time.
“Yes, Nazuna! What did Caesar say when he was assassinated?”
“Idiot! That wasn’t even my final form!”
“You’re the idiot! What kind of bluff is that! He’s getting assassinated! Most likely he’s in pain! And why’re you looking so confident! The answer is obviously wrong!”
As expected, I gave a retort, whereas Machina quietly rang her bell with “Sorry, but I’m taking this question”.
“Yes, Machina! What did Caesar say when he was assassinated?”
“You’re Brutus too?”

“Why!? How many Brutus are there? Can he use a doppelganger skill or what!?”
With no rest, I gave another retort, whereupon Elni hit the bell with attitude, saying “I see. I get it now!”.
“…It should be obvious now, but Elni, what did Caesar say when he was assassinated?”
“You weren’t Brutus!?”
“Then who was it! Brutus was the right one! Give it a rest already with the weird answers!”
Continuous retorts. When I raised a loud voice, Luna made a wry smile and opened her mouth.
“Ehm, the second question is about baseball. In the batting box stands a batter, who hit a homerun before. The catcher senses danger, stands up and raises his arm up high, putting up the glove. Now, what is the catcher signalizing to the pitcher?”
With a question of this level, the answer “An intentional walk” should come up right away.
I thought so, whereupon Nazuna already rang her bell.
“Okay, Nazuna, what’s the catcher signalising to the pitcher?”
“A clever talk!”
“What nonsense is that! They’re standing apart, so how could they talk!? Even the pitcher will shake his head on this!”
“Then it’s a man’s aesthetic!”
“The heck? You mean like encouraging the pitcher? But the catcher already stood up!”
“Then! A mood unique for boy’s schools!”
“As if! Enough from you! You’re next, Machina!”
“Ehh!? I didn’t ring my bell yet? And I’m not knowledgeable about baseball…”
“Even if you aren’t, you should be able to guess! Think about it! I’m sure you know it! What’s the catcher signalising to the pitcher?”
“A three-point shot?”
“This isn’t basketball! It’s baseball, not basketball, okay!?”
“Ehm… Three outs, side retired?”
“Now that’s nonsense! Even the pitcher will cry! Please, think a bit harder! What’s the catcher signalising to the pitcher?”
“…Game Set?”
“Why’re you making it worse! You want to end the game with a

single pitch? There's no way the umpire will shout 'Game Set' once the ball is pitched! If that were to happen, the opponent would go on a frenzy!"
While I felt my blood pressure raising from too much retorts, I threw a glance at Elni.
"Okay, Elni! Give me the answer!"
"I, I haven't rang my bell yet…"
"I thought you would know it! Come on, answer! What's the catcher signalising to the pitcher?"
"A beer tonight!"
"Why's he already in party mood? The home run batter is standing in the batting box! The catcher sensed danger, so it's obviously an intentional walk!"
Not enduring it any longer, I shouted out the right answer, whereupon it resulted in Machina tilting her head with "…What's an intentional walk?".
But I was the one, who came up with this question. I was at fault. While I made a sigh, Luna rested her hand comforting on my shoulder and softly gave the next question.
"Now onto question three. It is a geography question this time. The opposite of the South Pole is—"
Before Luna could finish the question, Nazuna repeatedly rang her bell.
"Ohh, pumped up, aren't we. Okay Nazuna, the opposite of the South Pole is?"
"Nonexistent!"
"Don't screw around! Are you picking a fight? Of course it exists!"
"No! It doesn't! Really!
When Nazuna puffed up her chest confident, Machina too agreed with "Yeah", but as expected, Elni widened her eyes with "Ehh!? Machina!?" and timidly rang her bell.
"Uhm, the right answer is the North Pole, Shinobu."
"…Your final answer?"
"F- Final dancer."
"Dance all you want! is what I want to say, but— that's right! Elni gets one point!"
"Hahaha! This is the power of the Goddess! Did you see that, Machina, Nazucat?"

It wasn't something to brag about this much, but to save strength, I kept my retort to myself. I just left it at a shrug with my shoulders, whereas Luna opened her mouth with a smile.
"Then for the fourth question. It is another history question. Who build the Oosaka Castle?"
Instantly, Nazuna let her bell resound faster than the others with "Meow!".
"…Nazuna, you're the only Japanese amongst the participants. Please give the right answer."
"Leave it to me, Brother! I know the answer! The one who built the Oosaka Castle was the Monkey, also called the bald rat!"
"W- Well, that's not wrong, but these nicknames belong to whom?"
"The social study teacher!"
"Apologize! Apologize to him right away! And reflect a bit on your own action!"
"I, I'm sorry, social study teacher. I messed around too much…"
When Nazuna obediently lowered her head, Machina rang her bell with a wry smile.
"This question is easy. We learned it in class the other day. The right answer is Toyotomi Hideyoshi, right?"
"—Hold it, Machina!"
Suddenly stopping Machina's answer, Elni continued with a slim smile.
"You're too naïve, Machina. This is a trick question. The right answer is, the carpenter!"
"—Yes, correct! Elni has two points now!"
When I instantly replied affirming, both Nazuna and Machina raised an "EHH!?" voice in harmony, then relaxed their expressions a bit. But I suppressed the smile that was about to form on my face and opened my mouth.
"Now then, the next one will be the last. For Machina and Nazuna's sake, the right answer for this will specially earn two points. If either of you answers right, you'll go into an extra round with Elni."
"S- Somehow that makes me efforts so far go to waste, but I don't mind! I'll stand victorious no matter the disadvantage! So please read the next question, Luna!"
"Yes, very well, Elni-chan."
Replying to Elni with a smile, Luna took out a single memo sheet

from her pocket.
“The last question comes from Tomoe-san. Ehm, what is the size of Luna-chan’s breasts— wait, wh- what is this?”
“What you ask, the last question, isn’t it?”
Even while I was a bit agitated, I looked at Luna’s chest partly teasing.
“Sorry Luna, but as the moderator, I need to know the right answer. Tell me it secretly.”
“Uhm, well, ehm…” with that, she embarrassedly rubbed her index fingers against each other and brought her face closer to my ear, as she wanted to tell me despite that.
“Brother, I know the right answer!” “Me too! Pick me, Shinobu!” “No, Shinobu is going to pick me! I believe I rang the bell faster than you two!”
In that way, all of the participants rang their bells together, so
“You’re so noisy! Keep it down!”
I abandoned my moderator role as a joke, whereupon the participants all widened their eyes with “””WHY!?”””, but regardless to my warning, Nazuna raised a voice before long.
“Brother! Luna-oneechan has a bust size of 97cm!”
“H- Hey, Nazuna! That’s not fair! If you get the two points, I’m automatically eliminated!”
“—Not just you, Machina! Nazucat too! The match is mine! You two still have a lot to learn!”
After giving Machina and Nazuna a fearless smile, Elni sharply pointed at Luna’s beautiful huge breasts.
“Her size at her waist or hips hasn’t changed, but she hasn’t gotten bigger around the chest! However, she’s trying to fudge it! The truth is: Bust size 98, waist 58 and hips 89, she’s a G-cup! She even might go into the three digits at this rate!”
“I- If they get that big, I will have nothing to wear again! Please do not say so scary things! Also, I am sorry for trying to deceive you!”
Luna covered her bright red face with both hands and Machina and Nazuna nodded at each other with “…My sister‘s so amazing.” and “I’ll never be able to beat that.”, whereas I raised a voice with “Correct!”.
“Elni wins! Congratulations. The second daughter of the Nanjou family is indeed you, Elni.”

Backing up my words with feelings, I gave a big applause, whereupon
“Well, I’m not opposed if it’s Elni.”
“Elni-chan usually is an older sister anyway.”
Following my lead, Machina and Nazuna gave an applause too, whereupon, Elni, probably unaware of the true meaning behind this, proudly puffed up her chest, whereas Luna excitedly left the living room with a smile. Like planned, she brought my mother back here right away.
And my mother carried a brilliant light pink kimono in her hands. While everyone still gentle applauded, my mother slowly approached Elni, held out the kimono in her hands to her and declared.
“I heard it from Luna-chan. Congratulations on your victory, Elni. This is your prize.”
“This kimono? But it looks really expensive. For only me to receive something like that…”
“You don’t need to show any reservation. I prepared it for New Year anyway.”
“…For New Year?”
“Yes, I wanted to see my daughter all dressed up.”
“Your daughter all dressed up… Could it be, this kimono was meant for Nazucat?”
Elni asked awkwardly. However my mother just smiled, replying nothing. But she must have wanted Elni to notice the meaning behind her words by herself. Luna dropped her gaze onto the kimono, lightly pulled Elni on her hand by brightly saying “Let us try it on” and left the room.
After a while, Elni wearing the brilliant kimono came back together with Luna.
A light pink kimono decorated with flowers like peony or chrysanthemum. Elni wore it somewhat elegant. Her brilliant silver hair was hanging down free, which gave her an unusual neat aura and the beautiful kimono was showing off Elni’s charm.
I was inadvertently captivated. Luna, Machina and Nazuna reddened their cheeks fascinated too and my mother narrowed her eyes peacefully, whereas only Elni rocked her big crimson eyes in confusion.
“…This, is just strange. It fits me perfectly. It’s a prize, yet it surely

only fits me… And Tomoe-san said she prepared it because she wanted to see her daughter all dressed up…”
Most likely Elni started to understand the meaning behind the word “daughter” that my mother had spoken out. Elni blurred her rocking eyes a bit, whereupon my mother quietly sat down upon seeing that and simply looked at her gently.
“Hey Elni… Your mother’s already gone, right?”
“Yeah… She died crying. It happened… a long time ago though…”
This probably was a continuation from the conversation in the garden the other day. Elni lightly trembled her voice and forcefully put on a smile again, whereupon my mother quietly nodded a “I see…” and reached out her hand to her with “Before I couldn’t tell you, but”.
“If you want, I can become your second mother, Elni.”
“…I’m really happy, but I don’t think that’ll work.”
“Why?”
My mother asked softly, whereas Elni tightly squeezed her fists and replied.
“I mean, I’m sure my real mother will be sad if I call you ‘Mother’, Tomoe-san. I’m sure… it’ll make her cry.”
“That’s not true, Elni. I told you before, didn’t I? Like me, your mother loved her own child. So she’ll definitely smile.”
While petting Elni’s head with her extended hand, my mother spun her words warmly.
“For example, if it eases Shinobu and Nazuna‘s sadness and makes them smile by calling someone else ‘mother‘ after I died, then I’ll be grateful to that second mother. I’m sure it’s the same for your mother, Elni.”
“…Really? She won’t cry again?”
“It definitely will be fine. You might not know yet, but that’s how mothers are. No matter how cold you are to them and even if you make them cry, a mother always wishes for her child’s happiness, which will also be her own happiness. Really mysterious, isn’t it.”
Softly relaxing her expression,
“A mother, who doesn’t wish for her child’s happiness, can’t be called a mother anymore, but your mother isn’t like that, right? She wishes for your happiness, right?”
Like gently enveloping her, my mother embraced Elni.
“So it’s fine. Everything you did for your mother or made her do for

you, you can try it on me. If that makes you smile, I'm sure even your mother will smile in joy."
"…Why are you… so kind… to me…?"
"You don't know without me telling you?"
Temporarily stopping her words, my mother smiled warmly.
"Because I love you, Elni, and think of you as my daughter. So stop being considerate or smiling all the time, and be selfish sometimes. When you're sad, cry. If I'm good enough, I'll always be there for you."
"…I… But, I…"
Hesitating, Elni was at a loss for words, whereas Nazuna and Machina looked at each other, then cleared their throats with a caught to get the attention. Following, they looked at Elni after a small pause and each let their feelings resound in their voices.
"Let me say it again. Congratulations on your victory, Elni-oneechan."
"That kimono suits you really well, Elni-oneesama."
The dear addressing of an older sister. The crimson eyes started to get incredible blurry.
"…I knew it was strange from the beginning. You all strangely teased me today and were smiling even though it's exam time. From the beginning, you all… gave your best… for, for someone like me…"
It probably was due to seeing through our plan and everyone's conveyed feelings. Still embraced by my mother, Elni spilled big tears from her crimson eyes and seeing that, Nazuna called out to her a bit worried.
"Could it be… you didn't like it, Elni-chan?"
"…No, of course not. I'm really happy about it."
Entwining her arms around my mother's back and hugging her tightly, Elni looked at each our faces.
"Thank you for doing all this for me, Shinobu, Luna. Thank you for taking me as your older sister, Machina, Nazuna. Thank you for the wonderful kimono… Mom."
For an outsider this might have been a trivial thing. For the first time, Elni called Nazuna by her name, not by her nickname, and my mother as "Mom".
—Even just by a different way of calling, a relationship changed a bit.

Was it able to change this time for sure? Did we become a family?
To be honest, I wasn't sure yet. But even so, Elni's smiling expression while she was crying surrounded by everyone, was more radiant than any other smile I had seen on her before…

Even after the contest ended, everyone stayed in the living room, spending a really gentle and peaceful time. Even while Machina said "It's embarrassing, so only for today", she animated her voice with "Elni-oneesama" without hiding her bliss, and Nazuna clung spoiled onto Elni with "Elni-oneechan" numerous times.
While my mother and I watched over that, Elni happily brought her guitar from her own room and Luna her keyboard with a smile.
The keyboard was a present from Hijiri to Luna for her birthday.
While I recalled that, Elni and Luna started to play a bright melody with each their instrument, and Nazuna let resonate a fitting cheerful song to it.
My mother, Machina and I gave them an applause and after their performance, Elni handed her guitar to Nazuna, as she was staring at it, and started to teach her *little sister* how to play it.
"Nazuna, first you have to remember the cords: Minor, major, seventh…"
"Mhm~ It's kinda difficult. I wonder if I'll be able to play so cool like you, Elni-oneechan."
"Fufu, I think you'll be able to in no time."
Her first guitar playing. While Luna, Machina and my mother watched over Nazuna's practice, Elni sung the lullaby from the other day as soon as she pulled out a piece of paper from her pocket, while she wrote down the score without end. Hearing this song, Luna relaxed her cheeks with "Such a nice song", whereupon
"You know, my mother wrote this song." with that, Elni smiled proudly at Luna and finished writing down the score. She handed them to Luna without hesitation.
"The song I got from my mother has always been my treasure. But since you gave me a lot of things and I'm happy about it, I'll give this treasure to you, Luna."
"…You are giving it to me, not Machina or Nazuna-chan?"
"Of course. I'm the second daughter of the Nanjou family, so you're my older sister. Thus I'm giving it to you. Please sing it to your child once you have one."

Luna showed a small bewilderment, whereas Elni continued with a remarkably gentle tone.
“—Luna, no more holding back, okay? You don’t have to give up anymore. Just take what you always wanted.”
It were a bit mysterious words. But they might have a special meaning for Luna. She damped her eyes a bit.
“Thank you. I love you, Elni-chan.”
With a somewhat bleared voice, she tightly hugged Elni. There Nazuna looked alternating at Machina and our mother and pulled reserved on Elni’s sleeve, albeit a bit hesitant.
“Hey Elni-oneechan, you taught me how to play the guitar and gave Luna-oneechan a song. But Mom and Machina-oneechan still haven’t —”
“It‘s okay, Nazuna. Machina-chan aside, I’m a parent. The smile of my child is enough for me. I don’t need anything else.”
When my mother softly cut into Nazuna’s words, Machina too said with a peaceful smile.
“I’m fine too. I feel bad for Nazuna and my sister, but I already received a lot of things from Elni-oneesama first. She gave me plastic models, taught me how to cook and even meddle in a certain organisation for my sake.”
My mother was listening, so Machina kept it a bit vague and continued happily.
“When I was wavering, she took on the ungracious part of making me realize my mistake. Thanks to that, I was able to stay here so far. I really thank you, Elni-oneesama.”
…Machina the hybrid devil. The exorcist organisation didn’t tolerate her. And Elni had asked Sougo-san to change the opinion of that organisation. When Machina previously tried to return to the demon realm, it wasn’t just me who stopped her, but Elni played a big role too.
Along with words of gratitude, Machina followed Luna’s lead and hugged Elni too, whereupon
“Goof for you, Machina…”
Like treating a little sister, Elni dearly started to pet Machina’s head.
Afterwards, the girl group took a bath together and played a video game while smiling bright together… These smiles didn’t even break once.

Right now this certainly was the place where Elni belonged to. It felt like she was part of our family. So I thought that I wanted days like today, special because of the pettiness, to keep occurring and let Elni smile on forever…

Since there was school tomorrow, we couldn't stay up too late. Midway in the game, Nazuna fell asleep and we regretfully ended our time together for now, postponing it until tomorrow.
However, we just had so much fun earlier, so even after I returned to my own room, the excitement wouldn't leave my body and I enjoyed that feeling by myself while sitting on my bed, whereupon there was a small knock on the door and Elni peeked her head in, animating her voice with a smile towards me.
"Shinobu! Let me rest on your arm! I want to sleep together with you tonight!"
"…That's embarrassing, so please leave."
"Your request is denied! I won't pull back so easily today! I'm the second daughter of this house! In other words, your older sister! Your older sister's words are absolute!"
"No, even if you're the second daughter, doesn't that still make you my little sister?"
"Then please, Shinobu-oniichan, let me sleep with you tonight. If you decline, I'll bite you like the angry Nazuna. BAD Mad Dog!"
"…Do want you want."
Like she had said, Elni wouldn't back off so easily. Giving up to change her mind, I lay down on the bed, whereupon Elni got onto the bed as soon as she turned off the lights, slipped under the blanket and clung to me tightly.
Elni's soft body. Her sweet fragrance tickling my nasal cavities. Her pleasant body temperature. While I was secretly agitated, Elni slowly started talking peacefully after a while.
"Hey Shinobu, so far, I have travelled to a lot of places and met a lot of people, befriending them, so I received really a lot of things. I got lots of smiles. I was taught a lot of things. Like playing the guitar, cooking, making accessories, using talismans…"
Peacefully spinning her words, Elni midway continued with "But".
"While I feel bad for everyone that gave me so many things or taught me so many things, the thing I'm the most happy about is… what you gave me, Shinobu. That you stayed by my side. I never thought I

would make a place more precious than the one with my mother.”
Clinging to me even stronger, Elni blurred her voice warmly.
“…Thank you… for fulfilling my dream, Shinobu.”
“Elni, I should be thanking you. You gave all of us a lot of things. It’s hard to put into words, but I feel at ease with you by my side. With you smiling by our side, I think we can keep smiling no matter what happens.”
“You can’t make light of my Goddess’ power.”
Cracking a joke with her still blurred voice, Elni declared softly.
“Enough talking. You have school tomorrow, right? You better sleep now.”
“…Doesn’t seem like I’ll be able to sleep like this, though.”
“Fufu, you’re such a spoiled kid, Shinobu. Then I’ll sing you a lullaby as an exception.”
It wasn’t like I was spoiled, but I was wide-awake from the excitement. However, not waiting for my reply, Elni sung the lullaby from a different country that she had presented to Luna.
Embracing my body like enveloping it and dearly petting my head, she made the gentle song resound in my heart. Upon that, my consciousness slowly and comfortable faded amidst her song and warmth, making me fall into light slumber.
“…Why did I… even become a Goddess…”
In place for the interrupted song,
“Sorry, Shinobu. It was so much fun being with everyone and I loved everyone, loved them so much, so… I became really scared.”
Her voice, not reaching my ears, came fuzzily from somewhere far away.
“I’ll surely end up breaking it again. Break everything again. But this is my most precious place, so I definitely won’t break it. I’ll never make any of you cry. Therefore I asked Bram to erase the memories. By tomorrow, you all will have forgotten about me. But…”
All that was conveyed to me was her soft heartbeat.
“You can forget about someone like me. You don’t have to cry over someone like me.”
Along with a sensation of a warm teardrop falling onto my cheek,
“Bye-bye, Shinobu. I’ll always remember you. Even if I can’t see you guys, I’ll never forget you. I’ll… always… love you…”
Before my consciousness fell into the darkness, the gentle heartbeat

slowly got away and I got the feeling that I heard just her crying properly…

♥♥!

It was a morning like always. While the sound of rain resounded from outside, I reluctantly opened my eyelids urged by a beautiful voice like a bell ringing, whereupon my vision fell on Luna's smiling face. It was such an ordinary morning. Before I noticed it, I was looking around my room, looking for someone, and I opened my mouth confused.
"Hey Luna, was there someone else here this morning?"
"Eh? There was no one when I came in."
Luna tilted her head wondering. I too tilted my head like Luna with "Strange", whereupon Luna softly urged me again.

“Machina, Nazuna-chan and Tomoe-san are waiting for you, Shinobu-san. Please come down quickly for breakfast.”
“…Mh? What about her?”
“Her? Who do you mean?”
“You know, her. Ehm… What was her name again?”
When I tilted my head again, Luna must have thought that I was still

half-sleep. She left the room smiling with “Everyone is waiting, so please hurry up”. On the other hand, I felt something amiss with Luna’s “everyone” sentence and suddenly a dull pain ran through my head.
…Did I catch a cold?
Making a small sigh, I dressed myself and went to the dining kitchen, where everyone sat at the table together like always. Luna, Machina, Nazuna and my mother.
Exchanging a short greeting with them, I said down at the table too, but for some reason a breakfast was served before an empty seat. No one touched their breakfast and stared at the empty seat like waiting for someone, whereupon Luna showed an embarrassed smile and said.
“I am sorry. I seem to be half-asleep as well today, so I ended up making one portion too much.”
How unusual for Luna to make such a mistake. Everyone was a bit surprised, but we each picked up our chopsticks a bit hesitant. Amidst that, Nazuna looked around at our faces and started talking timidly.
“Hey, did anyone come into my room last night?”
On that question, everyone exchanged looks, then each shock their heads. whereupon Nazuna tilted her head wondering.
“Maybe it was… a hasty Santa Claus?”
“You’re the hasty one, Nazuna.”
Nazuna said something strange, whereas my mother replied happily.
“It’s still a way until Christmas, yet you already snuck your present into my drawer, didn’t you? I was really surprised. Were you half-asleep too?”
“Eh? Present? I don’t know anything about it.”
“…Oh come one. You gave me so many beads bracelets. There was even a memo with ‘Thank you for the kimono, Mom! This is your Christmas present!’… I don’t remember giving you a kimono, but it said mom…”
As she felt a headache midway in her sentence, my mother frowned and covered her face with one hand, trembling her voice a bit with “…Who did I give that kimono to…”.
The strange Christmas present for my mother. Me included, no one knew anything about it and in the end, we never figured out from

whom the present was…

The usual way to school. The usual classes at school. The really usual lunch break.
But something was lacking and not knowing what it was, I felt a baffling pain in my chest while I watched the rain that poured down since the morning, whereupon the perverted with the handsome face aka my friend Asada, who had eaten lunch together with me, called out to me worried.
“Hey Nanjou, you have been spacing out since the morning. Did something happen?”
“Yeah, I’m a bit troubled right now. It seems I lost something really precious. I have to get it back. Help me, Asada.”
“I have no reason to refuse you. Leave it to me. So, what are we getting back?”
“You know, Asada, the truth is… I’m out of money for this month.”
“Snore, snore. Mumble, mumble. Boobies, boobies dream.”
“Hey, Asada, stop feigning a sleep so obviously. I’m gonna poke your eyeballs with my chopsticks.”
When I gave a harsh retort like always, Asada made a sigh of relief for some reason.
“Seems you still have the energy to crack a joke for now. I’m a bit relieved. And I feel stupid for worrying. Since it’s you, you’re surely troubled about having too many beloved girls to spend Christmas with.”
“I’m not troubled about that. I just have to love all of them together.”
“…I got a bit of a killing intent just now. Keep that up and I’ll kill you.”
While we both messed around like that, I casually asked Asada.
“By the way, Pervert, how are you going to spend this year’s Christmas?”
“Good question, Mr. Gigolo. Usually I name myself the solo type or horny beast, but only on Christmas I’ll a normal guy.”
“Oh, just like during the summer vacation, you’re going to dirty the screen of your pc by kissing the girl of a game?”
“That was a visionary love shown to me from the summer heat. But Christmas won’t be like that.”
Quietly stopping his words, Asada changed his usual easygoing tone into a gentle one.
“I’ll spend Christmas with my family. Tomoyuki-san— No, I mean my

dad will apparently come home early. My mother and sister will be home too. I'm spending Christmas together with my family, even though I'm already a high schooler, you know? Aren't you jealous?"
"No, I'm doing the same. So I'm not really—-"
I started talking, but inadvertently stopped my words.
"H- Hey? Nanjou? What's up so suddenly? You're a bit strange today after all."
I suddenly felt a faint headache, a feeling of loss and my tears wouldn't stop.
Not hearing Asada's voice, someone's sad voice was resounding in my heart.
—A Christmas party, huh. Sounds kinda fun. Okay. I'll stay at your house until Christmas is over.
"…So much for that. You're gone now."
A monologue spilled out of my own mouth. I just couldn't figure out at whom these words were directed, but even so, I couldn't hold back the overflowing tears…

As she had no work for the student council today either, I was on my way home from school with Machina walking next to me like yesterday. We finally had a chance to go home together, yet we had nothing to talk about in particular, so both Machina and I listened to the calm sound of the rain while holding our umbrellas, whereupon we happened to run into Luna at a crossroad.
She held an umbrella and a shopping bag with a somewhat depressed expression. Moreover, Luna kept her gloomy face even when she noticed us, and I called out to her a bit bewildered.
"Ehm, fancy meeting you here. You were out shopping?"
"…Yes, I was, but something is strange."
Even while she nodded lightly, Luna trembled her hand that held the umbrella a bit.
"After I finished my shopping, I was thinking about something absurd like if she was playing with the children at the nursery school again, and ended up going there. And when the nursery teacher asked me 'Are you here to pick her up?', I reflexively answered with 'Yes'… but I wonder who I was going to pick up?"
Luna knitted her eyebrows troubled. A sense of discomfort and a loneliness in the heart. Maybe it wasn't just Luna and me, who were holding such feelings.

Most likely Machina was the same. After getting home together with Luna, she headed for the kitchen with her shopping bag, whereas Machina was staring at the top of the shoe locker while taking off her shoes.
What was she doing? When I followed her gaze a bit curious, there stood a plastic model with an unsociable face… Mh? Why did I think it was an unsociable face? I doubtfully tilted my head, whereupon
"…Shinobu, this plastic model is cool, isn't it?"
At the same time of these words, her voice got out of order.
"You see, my room is full of these models. I'm not interested in them in the slightest, so I probably got them from someone. Someone might have given me a lot of his treasures. But I can't recall who it was at all and when I wake up in the morning and see the models, I get to think…"
Every time she spoke out a word, her voice was incredible blurred.
"Hey Shinobu, was my room… always this big?"
—Look, Machina! Isn't it done cool? I'll give it to you!
—From today on it'll protect the Nanjou Household's front door. Because I graduated from being a personal guard. I'm busy with my job at the nursery school. It'll be the successor to Mad Dog.
Again. The voice resounded again. My tears were about to overflow again. That voice echoed right in the middle of my chest. But the voice disappeared right away and even when I desperately tried to recall it, it didn't come back. Unable to say anything to the hoarse Machina, I could only watch her leave quietly.
…What was this feeling clamouring in the back of my heart?
Suppressing my incredible aching chest, I went to the living room for a change of pace, where Nazuna sat on the sofa. Wherever she had it from, Nazuna was holding a guitar… Strangely enough, I remembered that guitar. It belonged to someone.
But I couldn't figure out who and stared at the guitar, whereupon Nazuna noticed me and despite her usual bright self, she dropped her voice with "Welcome home, Brother".
While I was confused by that reaction, I dared to ask with a casual tone.
"You're home quite early today. What about your club activities?"
"…I'm taking the day off. Somehow, I came back here thinking I forgot something, but wherever I look, I can't find it… Strange, isn't

it? I don't even know what I'm looking for."
"Well, I'm the same as you since the morning. Anyway, what's with that guitar?"
"This? It was in my room when I woke up this morning. It said it was a Christmas present. I thought it was from a hasty Santa Claus, but it seems it's from my older sister."
"Your older sister? Luna or Machina?"
"Probably neither. They never had a guitar to begin with and besides, while I didn't notice it this morning, when I opened the drawer of my desk in search for that something I forgot… there was a letter."
While she continued to talk, tears gradually dwelled up in Nazuna's eyes.
"In the letter it said: 'Make everyone smile in my stead. I'm sure you can do it, Nazucat, no, Nazuna. Also, the guitar in your room is a Christmas present for you from me! Best wishes, your older sister.'… I don't really get it. Who was it again… that called me 'Nazucat'?"
"I don't get it either…"
—Wait, Aki! Where're you going with my guitar! It's my treasure! Please give it back!
"I get the feeling that guitar was the treasure of someone."
Probably that voice resounded in Nazuna's heart too.
"I saw someone play this guitar and really liked it. I wanted to watch her perform forever… Now that I have it, I won't get to see it again."
Along with her words, Nazuna finally spilled tears. But still holding the guitar, she mumbled "I have to find that something I forgot…" and rushed out of the living room with no time for me to stop her.
The something we forgot. Just what had we forgotten? Still not knowing it, I headed into the kitchen for some tea, whereupon I suddenly heard the lullaby from a different country.
For some reason that lullaby swayed my heart and I faced the direction of the song, but… why did I feel like sighing? My vision fell onto Luna, who stood in the kitchen, as she was preparing dinner. And as she noticed my look, she turned around and stopped singing.
"…This lullaby is so wonderful."
"Yeah, I think so too, but what language is that? I don't really understand it."

Swallowing my sigh, I gave an agreeable response, whereas Luna replied smiling faintly.
“This song has a really kind message behind it. It is praying for the happiness of the children that will be born from now on. This song was her treasure… and she gave it to me…”
Luna was the same as Machina and Nazuna too. Thinking of someone, but unable to recall who it was. She trembled her voice and spilled tears, like a big hole spread in her chest.
…Why couldn’t we remember?
A feeling like guilt arose in my chest for some reason and after I finished a short talk with Luna, I returned to my room and slowly headed for my desk.
Everyone got all kind of presents. Strangely enough, I got the feeling that there was something for me too. Lead by that feeling, I slowly opened the topmost drawer of my desk, whereupon there was an unbeknown envelope in there. It might have been left there for me…
Suppressing my impatience, I took out the envelop and check the inside, whereupon… Were it tear marks? The paper I pulled out had spots that had been wet here and there, and suddenly an uneasiness started to spread in my chest. At the same time, the headache from this morning came back. But I dropped my gaze onto the paper regardless.
—I’m sure you, Shinobu, and the others have forgotten about me, so this letter might be creepy to you. Of course I don’t mind if you throw it away. But please, at least read it until the end once.
First off, I’m sorry for not waiting until Christmas. I noticed that this house is really precious to me, that I love everyone and that my desire to stay with everyone grew larger from day to day.
I liked your place better than any place I had been to before.
So I got scared. I had to leave, because you all loved me and treated me as your friend or family. If I had stayed like that, I would have made everyone cry in the end like always.
I’m sick of that already. I definitely don’t want to see you guys crying.
Actually I don’t want you to forget, but it’s better this way. And even if you forget about me, I’ll never forget about you. I’ll never forget the time we spent together. I’ll remember by looking at the pictures of everyone. I’ll always love you.

It’s a bit early, but I put your Christmas present in the topmost drawer of your desk. You can throw away the letter, but at least, please don’t throw away the present. I think you and Luna will need it.
No matter how much I write, it’ll only make me cry, so I’ll come to an end now.
Lastly, I was really happy to be your family, even if it was only for a short time. I’m going to brag about it to the people I’ll meet from now on. I’ll brag a lot that I had the best family in the world. With the memories I have with all of you, I can live on. So you don’t have to remember, Shinobu. Forget about me and keep smiling together with everyone.
Sorry. I wanted to come to an end, but wrote so much again.
But now it’s really the end.
Shinobu, thanks for smiling with me. Thanks for all the treasures. Thank you so much for granting me such a warm place.
Best wishes from the second daughter of the Nanjou Family.

…I didn’t know the writer of the letter. There was no name written. But, while I read the letter, my lips started to tremble and the tears in my eyes blurred my vision. I had a terrible headache. Even so, I reached out for the topmost drawer without hesitation.
—It’s a bit early, but I put your Christmas present in the topmost drawer of your desk.
With my heart swayed by the words in the letter, I timidly opened the drawer and peeked inside, whereupon there were countless beautiful bracelets made of beads and a single memo.
“Merry Christmas! If you put these on, you won’t be affected by a devil’s influence! You can stay together with Luna forever! Good for you, Shinobu!”
Incredible bright words. A radiant kindness. My headache got worse. In the back of my mind floated the appearance of a leaving girl. While I kept looking at the present, the girl’s voice resounded in my heart.
“—, what are you doing there?”
“This? It’s a bracelet made from beads. It’s my power and feelings in it, so won’t just be an accessory, but a good charm.”
“You have really skilled fingers. By the way, what kind of effect has that charm?”

“Well, if you put it on, you will no longer be under a devil’s influence. It’s way more powerful than a talisman.”
Every time I was about to remember that bright voice, a strong headache confused my thoughts. A pain like grating my head. Clenching my teeth, I kept enduring it— I could hear a heartbeat.
Her warm heartbeat. The gentle lullaby from a different country. It erased my headache and the appearance of the girl gradually became more vivid in my mind.
Radiant silver hair. Crimson eyes like a ruby. A slender and delicate body. A smile like a bloomed flower. A slightly stupid behaviour that made everyone laugh. The little girl was a bit of a weirdo that called herself a Goddess. She wasn’t a freeloader in our house, but a precious family member.
“____”
What did I shout at that time? Was I shouting in anger or crying? With no time to think about that, I rushed out of my room and left the house.
…It was raining.
My head was full of memories. When we first met, she selfishly ate my hot dog and when the typhoon came, she came over to our house and lived with us from then on.
During the culture festival, she came to school to play. Even during the summer we were together at my grandfather’s vacation house. During the sports festival, she came to cheer. And she supported Machina in her election campaign.
In these memories, she was always smiling, made everyone smile, could get along with anyone and was liked by everyone. Even so— there were tear marks on the letter. I couldn’t get that picture out of my head.
—Ahh… I see. Everyone’s already gone.
She had been crying. Crying in her sleep. And I wanted to stop her tears.
So there was still time. There should still be enough time. I wanted one last chance. Just like back then, when she left our house once, I should bring her back home.
…It kept raining.
Amidst the cold rain on the streets, the many memories rewound and I kept searching desperately. At the riverbank, where she had

lived until she came to live with us. At the park, where we had stopped Machina. At the nursery school, where she had worked.
I looked at every place I could think of. But she was nowhere. Nowhere. So she… probably abandoned the place she had belonged to.
“Tell me why… Elni.”
…It was raining.
And it surely would keep raining. This rain, which I couldn’t stop, would surely keep falling in her heart. From the ash-gray sky and from my own eyes, the rain kept falling… without pause or end.

Chapter 04
Everlasting Family

Elni's guitar in Nazuna's room with the notice "It's your Christmas present!". Elni's lullaby from a different country that Luna would sing sometimes. Various accessories made from beads by Elni, which were left in my mother's room. The double room without Elni felt disturbingly broad to Machina.
The call history in the cell phone. Numerous mails. Elni left small trails here and there.
Even while everyone felt something amiss with all these things, no one could remember Elni after all.
—I'm sure everyone will forget about me right away.
Indeed. Most likely, Elni intended it to be like that from the beginning. Everyone had forgotten Elni. The only possibility was the memory manipulation from devils. Elni's request to the Old Man Bram was probably to use that memory manipulation.
So I made numerous calls. To Elni and to the Old Man. But the calls never connected and I aimlessly ran around looking for Elni. I gradually spread my search radius, piling up travel expenses.
Still, no matter how long it took, I would definitely find Elni. Only I was remembering Elni. I hadn't even forgotten her crying face. What if Elni was crying all by herself again? Who else beside me would look for her?
The resolve in my heart got stronger by the day and ever since the day she left, I stopped going to school. Not taking my end of term exams, I pursued Elni without rest.
Everyone worried about me being like that, but I had no intentions to stop. The others were merely forgetting for now. Once they see Elni's face, they would surely remember.
But I had to hurry. When everyone's sense of discomfort disappeared, a life without Elni would become the norm. Urged by the impatience in my heart, I kept looking for Elni in a distant town due to reports from eye-witnesses without returning home once in the past few days. Even so, I still couldn't find her, so I once returned to my home city and I was advancing down the dim street

at night with heavy steps.
…The feelings in my chest weren't fading. But if felt like there was a hole in my heart, so I couldn't shake off the sadness. There was a limit to what I could do by myself. I had to ask someone for help. But no one was remembering Elni.
So I had hesitant the whole time… but I no longer had time to falter. With heavy steps, I stopped at my destination— in front of the Gogyou Mansion and tightly clenched my fists.

…They must have been surprised by my sudden visit. And they should be a bit bewildered about my constant absence at school. But neither Hijiri, nor Kaorun questioned me when they saw me.
Hijiri just let me into the house with a gentle smile and "Come in", and sat down with Kaorun in the broad living room. As they were waiting for me to speak, both of them kept silent peacefully. While I was grateful to these two, I started talking with "Hijiri, I have a favour to ask" with a honest tone and erasing my hesitation, I continued.
"I might be wrong, but the exorcist organisation has a diverse information network, hasn't it? If so, I want you to let me access these information."
"Ehm, the organisation certainly has various networks. We need to it investigate devils or conceal information about devils, but what do you want to do with these information?"
"…I want to look for someone. You two might not remember her, but she's called Elni. She has her silver hair tied in twin tails and her big eyes have a pretty crimson colour. Her appearance really stands out, yet I can't seem to find her…"
When I talked about Elni, Hijiri and Kaorun only showed a doubtful expression as expected.
"Do you really not remember her? She was a slightly stupid fellow, always made everyone laugh, could get along with anyone and was loved by everyone… but sometimes she forced a smile… and she even cried in her sleep…"
Even when I tried to explain it to them, my voice trembled incredibly.
"…She, never let anyone see her crying face. She was obsessed with not making anyone cry and kept it all to herself, crying by herself… In the end, that idiot… just left all by herself…. I don't know where she went… and by myself, I can't do anything…"
The tears I had been holding back so far, overflowed and blurred my

vision. My words too were rather unclear due to my sobbing. Not getting to the point either, I, as pathetic as it was, pleading reached out my hand towards Hijiri.
"…Please, Hijiri… Elni's an important part of my family… Even if everyone forgot… she's our family… I don't want her to cry… Therefore…"
From my mouth came only sobbing now. But I had to explain it properly, so I desperately tried to control my voice, whereupon Hijiri and Kaorun quietly stood up.
"I understand. Kaoru-san, investigate the girl called Elni now. She has silver hair tied in twin tails, crimson eyes, wears a yellow hoodie… and is a friend of my father…"
While mentioning information that I hadn't even talked about yet, Hijiri pressed her hand against her head midway in her sentence, as she felt a headache, and Kaorun must have had a sense of discomfort too. Blurring her eyes a bit, she rushed away as soon as she said "…I will look into it immediately", leaving the living room with attitude.
Surely neither of them remembered Elni yet. But undoubtedly Elni's voice resounded in the corner of their hearts, just like it did with me and the other girls. Hijiri only left me the words "I'll ask my father for help too, so wait a bit" and rushed out of the room with attitude like Kaorun. I could see impatience in her expression.
…Once Elni was back, the girl's expressions would change into smiles, wouldn't they?
While such thoughts crossed my mind, I used the opportunity to wipe away the tears from my eyes. And after a few minutes, the door of the living room slowly opened and the one who came in wasn't Hijiri, but Sougo-san to my surprise. He quietly came over to me.
"…I had Hijiri retire for now."
Saying so shortly, Sougo-san kept looking at me somewhat faltering and after a long silence, he opened his mouth somewhat calmly while filling his eyes with sadness.
"Nanjou-kun, do you know the story about the stupid girl?"
Instantly, I widened my eyes, whereupon Sougo-san continued with still a peaceful tone.
"You see, the stupid girl is a really kind girl. If she sees someone shouldering a burden too much to handle for him alone, she rushes over to that someone with a smile and makes him smile together

with her or sometimes cry together with her. But the girl won't take over that burden. Doing so is far more difficult and painful than simply lending a hand. And it becomes even more painful afterwards."
Just like speaking from experience,
"Supported by the stupid girl, that someone will eventually stop suffering from the heavy burden. He'll become strong enough to even carry other's burden. But at that time, the girl won't be next to him anymore. She'll disappear, just leaving a letter that says 'Thanks'."
Sougo-san filled his voice with regret, as if he was talking about his own past, and bit his lips.
"The stupid girl watches that someone walk next to a precious person from afar with a smile and goes to someone else again. She separates herself from her beloved people, even though that's really painful, and probably repeats that over and over… She must have been really lonely."
Most likely that "someone" was Sougo-san himself.
"Upon reuniting with the stupid girl, he realized that he was the stupid one. It's been decades since their last meeting, yet the girl hadn't change in the slightest. Her growth had stopped. At that time, he finally realized the reason the why the girl left him."
His voice became filled with more regret. His eyes were rocking with sadness.
"So he avoided meeting the girl. Because he knew that his expression would distort if he were to see her. He didn't want to show tears to the girl, which she hated. But he properly wanted to show her a smile once more, thank her properly, so he invited her for a meal before her departure and wanted to grant any wishes of her. That's all I could do."
Squeezing out the cracked words, Sougo-san directed his blurred eyes at me.
"Nanjou-kun, the stupid girl asked two things of me. First, she wanted me to help a hybrid devil, namely Machina. Second, she wanted me to keep quiet about the memory manipulation."
"…You knew about all this long ago, didn't you?"
"Sorry. There was nothing I could do about it. She, who was always smiling, asked me while crying, telling me that she doesn't want her precious people to cry."

Letting his expression distort greatly,
“—I always thought tears spilled on farewells are acceptable. With that in mind, I repeated various farewells. But it’s different with Shinobu and the others. I don’t want them to cry even once. And since Shinobu is kind, he’ll notice the truth about my body one day when his memories won’t be erased… and he’ll become like you, Sougo.”
The tears I thought to be dry before, now spilled tears.
“Shinobu might cry out of regret too. Just imagining that makes it unbearable for me. So please, Sougo, keep quiet about it to everyone. I’ll disappear quietly, because they’ll be fine now even without me.”
While sobbing, Sougo-san retold Elni’s words.
“Also… Thank you, Sougo. Even after we reunited, even after you noticed that about my body, you held it in for my sake, didn’t you? Thanks for not crying.”
After a while of quiet sobbing, Sougo-san quickly brought his voice under control and said.
“Nanjou-kun, you’re not like me. You’re quite different from me, who accepted Elni’s departure in the past. After all, you broke free from the memory manipulation with your own strength. Besides, it seems you’re special to Elni, so can I ask you to do what I couldn’t, to stay by her side?”
“…Elni was crying when she asked you, right?”
“Yeah, it was my first time seeing her like that.”
“Then my answer is obvious. I don’t want Elni to cry all by herself. I’ll search as much as I can to find her for sure.”
From hearing the story, I somewhat understood. Sougo-san was sympathizing with Elni. He also must know the reason why Elni left us. But I shouldn’t hear it from him. I had to hear it directly from Elni herself and the feeling in my chest grow even stronger…

♥♥!

In my slumber a lovingly fragrance tickled my nasal cavities. It was a somewhat sweet, but slightly cold fragrance of cigarettes. Maybe dad was smoking nearby? When I opened my eyelids still more than

half-asleep, my vision didn't fall on the familiar ceiling of my room, but on the crystal clear blue sky.
…Ah, right. I missed the last train yesterday and kept looking for Elni in a distant city until morning since I was already here… then I nodded off on a bench in a park. With my eyelids half opened, I pondered absentminded while still looking up to the blue sky. Just where was Elni?
It seems Sougo-san and the girls were doing their best, but the exorcist information network had trouble catching a trace of Elni. So my impatience and worry grew. Moreover, I was concerned about Luna and the other girls.
They all still didn't remember Elni. But trusting their own sense of discomfort, they each had started looking for Elni, but… what was this cigarette smell here?
I completely woke up during my pondering. Now I opened my eyelids completely and straightened up my body on the park bench, whereupon I noticed that my body had been covered with a black coat.
Such a kind person. I wanted to thank the owner of the coat, if he was nearby. Therefore I let my gaze wander around, whereupon I saw the back of a man right next to me.
Instantly the little bit of sleepiness within me was blown away. That long red hair undoubtedly belonged to the Old Man Bram. When I widened my eyes, the Old Man apparently felt my look and turned around with a quiet "So you're up".
With a cigarette in his mouth, the Old Man started talking with a stiff tone after a short hesitation.
"…Seems you're looking for Elni."
"Well, yeah… but how do you know?"
"One reason is that you tried to call me numerous times on my cell phone. Luna or Machina are one thing, but it was the first time for you to call me. So I could guess it more or less."
Showing an awkward expression, the Old Man blew out some smoke and continued with "Moreover,".
"The memory manipulation this time was rather far-reaching. Elni knows too much people. It was my first time using the spell for such a wide range, so I did it without my familiars, since I was worried it might come apart, but apparently the effect is somewhat weak for

those close to Elni.”
While saying so, the Old Man faced me.
“And you’re a special exception. I once used the spell on you already to erase your memories of Luna. You might have developed a resistance for it then. Either way, the others aren’t like you. They seem to feel something amiss due to weaker effect, but it’s unlikely they’ll remember Elni.”
Filling his expression with bitterness, the Old Man made a faint sigh.
“…Sorry, Shinobu, for making Luna and you go through a hard time.”
“Well, it certainly is hard, but it’s not something for you to apologize about. Elni wished for all of it, right? I heard most of the circumstances from Sougo-san— I mean, from an exorcist acquaintance. I’m not gonna lecture you, but Elni.”
“Lecture, huh. Going by that… it seems you have no intention to give up on her after all.”
“…Yeah. I can’t get her crying face out of my head. According to Machina, Elni often cried in her sleep. It might be that she’s crying all by herself right now too. I can’t leave her alone like that.”
“I agree with you on a rare occasion.”
While puffing smoke, the Old Man got a slightly heavier tone.
“However, you find Elni and then what? Elni left you out of her own choice. So even if you find her, it won’t automatically mean she’ll come back to you. Even so, will you look for her?”
“I won’t falter. I’ll definitely find her, ask for the reason why she left us and think of a way to make her stay with us.”
“…Do you think you’ll find a way?”
I replied to the calm question with a smile.
“I think, even if I look for it, I won’t find it that easily. So I’ll search for the answer with my own feet and hammer out a plan by opening a patch with my own hands. Well, that’s the teaching of my mother, though.”
“I see. I get your resolve. You have a fine mother.”
Grinding his cigarette into the portable ashtray he took out, the Old Man squinted faintly.
“I’ll drop by your house soon. Since you’re taking care of Luna and Machina, I want to thank your mother before going back to the demon realm.”
“Then play a game with Nazuna again. Also, thanks for this, Old

Man. You put the coat onto me, right?”
“Mhm, it’s for my girls’ sake. I don’t care if you freeze to death, but it would sadden my daughters.”
“Still, you helped me. Thanks.”
“…It’s no fun talking with you when you’re so serious.”
After taking the coat from me, the Old Man suddenly raised his head and shifted his gaze to the blue sky.
“Hey Shinobu, I’m indebted to Elni and you from the incident with Machina. But only listening to Elni’s request is a bit unfair, isn’t it? I wouldn’t mind granting your wish too.”
“…My wish?”
“You want to know Elni’s whereabouts, right?”
Showing a rare smile, the Old Man continued softly while turning his back to me.
“You see, I can’t really leave her alone too, so I had my familiar tail her. Though it seems Elni noticed it and made a run for it not long ago. But she shouldn’t have gone far from there yet. I leave the rest to you. The place is—”
Maybe the Old Man came to me with the intention to tell me about Elni right from the beginning. He described the place Elni was last seen to me in detail and quickly left afterwards, but I thank the Old Man numerous times and took out my cell phone.
The place Elni was last seen at. If I gathered information centred around that place, it might be able to pinpoint Elni’s whereabouts. My chest slightly rejoiced with hope and I quickly called Hijiri with the cell phone in my hand to get information from the exorcist network…

♥♥!

A clear illumination, passing couples, an unfamiliar townscape at evening and the filled shopping district, as today was Christmas Eve, were in the corner of my vision. The place was filled with the warmth of people, but I kept walking all alone amidst it. Like always, I kept searching exerted.
…I finally grasped it. With the help of the Old Man and the information network of the exorcists on top, I grasped Elni’s whereabouts. If the information wasn’t false, Elni should be

somewhere in this city. Thinking that made me increase my pace naturally.
Today was Christmas Eve. Actually we were supposed to hold a party with everyone tonight. Was Elni reminiscing about everyone, imagining the party without her and crying all by herself? If so, I wanted her to wait just a bit, just a little bit longer. I would find her soon enough. I wouldn't let her cry all by herself. I would even think of a way that lets her stay with us.
In high spirits, I just kept looking and looking for my precious family member on the streets filled with lots of unfamiliar faces… and I finally saw it again. I finally found her, finally met her.
Silver twin tails. Crimson eyes like rubies. An oversized yellow hoodie.
—Yeah, it was Elni.
It felt like I hadn't seen her for years. My chest became hot and I was close to tears. I inadvertently was rushing over to Elni, but midway my legs stopped.
…She was smiling.
I had thought for sure that she was crying because she couldn't see us. But the Elni in my vision was surrounded by a couple of girls. Even in this city she was surrounded by smiles. She really was liked by everyone…
Haha, she looked happy. Even without us, she was smiling.
I made a dry smile and a draught blew through my heart. Clenching my fists tightly, I hesitated to take another step forward, whereupon
"Ah…"
Her crimson eyes looked into mine. These eyes widened instantly and Elni flourished her expression upon noticing me, clearing forming a faint smile.
That smile was obviously different from the one directed at the girls around her. It was an expression overflowing with affection. Elni raised her hand highly from an incredible happiness and was going to open her small mouth, but then she stopped all movements, as she came back to her senses… Her expression distorted horrible.
The blossomed smile disappeared at once and big tears soaked her cheeks.
…Elni cried in front of everyone. The girls looked alternating at Elni and me, and even when they called out to her worried with "Elni-

chan?”, Elni didn’t force a smile like usually, but just cried sobbingly. No matter how distressed the girls around her looked, Elni wouldn’t smile at all. She just turned on her heel and ran away in an escape.
There was no longer hesitation in me. I immediately tried to chase after her, but the girls, who had been with her, came at me all at once.
“Please wait. We want to ask you something.” “You’re Shinobu-san, right? We saw it in a picture from Elni-chan.” “You’re Elni’s family, right?”
Each raising a voice, the girls grabbed the sleeves of my clothes. They must be Elni’s new friends. All of them had a serious expression and I stopped to answer their questions.
“Yeah, I’m Shinobu and Elni’s my family, but… did you hear that from her?”
“Yes. She sometimes brags about it, that she has a wonderful family. Then she happily shows us her album and smiles cheerful, but…”
“Midway she always ends up crying. When we first met, she was crying too. ‘I parted with my family. But I want to see Shinobu’s smile. I want to eat Luna’s meals. I want to play with Machina and Nazuna. I want to thank Mom, who gave me a kimono, even more’…”
“Saying so, she sometimes cries even now. Because she always speaks about the same things, we ended up memorizing it. She also said ‘I want to see Hijiri, Kaorun and Miichan too. But I won’t see them again. I don’t want to be a Goddess anymore’… Even after we became friends, all kind of things reminded her of her family or friends, so she ended up crying every time.”
“So she… was crying… this much.”
Even though she was usually smiling, after separating from us, she still thought of us…
Hearing the girls’ words, I clenched my fists again, whereas
“…Please go pick up Elni-san. We’ll be sad about parting with her, but it’s better that she stays with her beloved ones. I’m sure she’ll be in the park. When we first met and even now, she often cries there.”
“Yeah, okay. Thanks for telling me. I’m glad Elni had friends like you.”
But from now on, I wanted her to be at our side again. After I thanked them once more for telling me the location of the park, I

started running by kicking off the ground with attitude.
At some point the evening sky had completely gone down. The night sky started to sparkle with stars. Underneath it, I reached the park out of breath. The park was clad in silence and on a bench in a corner, there was the small appearance of Elni. Traces of tears were left on her cheeks and I quietly stood before her.
"…Good evening. What are you doing here? Are you lost?"
"No, I came looking for something. I had been looking for it the whole time. And not just me, everyone was searching."
Desperately keeping my voice in check,
"You see, lately Nazuna won't let go off the guitar, saying she might remember something. Luna often cooks one portion too much and sometimes goes to the nursery school, even though there's no one to pick up anymore. Machina's crying about her room being too broad and even my mother suddenly started crying during a meal."
Slowly talking about everyone,
"Even the diligent Hijiri is skipping school together with me. And Kaorun is tagging along with Hijiri, searching seriously without complaining or joking around on a rare occasion. Likewise, Miichan is really sad that she can't remember while helping Nazuna. She often cries together with Nazuna."
Hearing my words, Elni rocked her big eyes.
"Elni, it's all because you're gone."
Softly declaring so, I held out my hand to her.
"Everyone's waiting for you. I'm sure they'll remember everything once they see your face. So let's go home together, Elni."
"You… were looking… for me the whole time? You remembered me the whole time? Just… why…"
"You need to ask? Because you're my family. I don't want you to cry all by yourself. So don't go anywhere on your own anymore and stay with us forever."
I straight held out my hand for Elni even more. But Elni didn't move while looking at my hand, just spilling tears from her eyes.
"Sorry. I'm sorry, Shinobu. You finally remembered me and did your best to find me, but I really can't become your family. It mustn't be."
"Could you tell me why? Sougo-san and the Old Man Bram might know, but I want to hear it directly from you."
"….It's a long story." with such a calm foreword after a long

hesitation, Elni started to tell me peacefully. About the distant past. About a single little girl…

♥♥!

The little girl from the village was different from others by birth.
Silver hair and crimson eyes. The mysterious power of being able to talk with animals. An albino girl.
She had a bright personality that made her get along with anyone, had many friends and was the spitting image of her beautiful smiling mother. At some point, the villagers called that albino girl the child of God and repeatedly asked her for various wishes.
The girl loved the villagers. So she desperately tried to grant their wishes. But she realized how powerless she was. So she offered her prayers to God. She wished for power. And the villagers prayed as well, that the little girl may be the child of God.
The girl's wish. The villagers' faith. These two sentiments overlapped… and a miracle occurred. God answered to the girl and villagers.
From that day on, the girl gained various powers and stopped being human. She became a Goddess capable of granting the villagers' wishes. Of course the villagers rejoiced and worshipped the girl even more, giving her pretty clothes and a fancy place to live in.
In response to that, the girl healed the villagers' wounds or illnesses, prayed for a good harvest and as the village gradually grew larger, so did the number of children and everyone was smiling.
Amidst that, only the mother of the girl cried with "Why?". The most important person to the girl, her beloved mother… Only she was crying all the time. Because the girl wanted to see her mother smile, because she wanted to grant her wish, she often asked her mother for her wish. But the mother would never give her an answer.
"It's something I mustn't wish for."
Always replying that, the mother never spoke out her wish. Also, the girl was worshipped as a Goddess, so she lived separated from her mother and there even opened up a distance to the villagers. Unable to play with her friends anymore, she was forced to only play the Goddess… She became all alone.

But as long as she could see everyone's smiles, the girl was happy with just that. With only that she should be able to endure it. However, as the years went by, the girl gradually became unable to bear it. What started it?
Probably the fact that she couldn't see the smile of her most precious person without being able to grant her wish.
The years only went by harshly and one day the lifespan of the girl's mother came to an end. The mother had eagerly clung to her life. She had kept wishing with all her might that the faith would stop, while she shed tears. But the girl stayed a Goddess all the time and on the mother's deathbed, she cried out.
"Please tell me your wish! I haven't granted a single wish for you, Mom! I don't want that! I'll grant anything for you! Just say it!"
The girl raised a desperate voice. After receiving the grace from God, her own daughter had not aged a single day. Seeing her like that made the mother finally cry in front of the girl.
"I… didn't need… a Goddess…"
She sobbed and shed endless tears.
"You know, I loved you so much, even when you weren't a Goddess, even when you couldn't do anything. I wanted to live together with you. I wanted to eat together, take baths together and play together…"
With only regrets left,
"I'm sorry, that I couldn't keep the promise, ***-chan."
Calling the girl by her real name at the very end, the mother passed away while crying. And it wasn't just the mother. All of the girl's past friends said so on their deathbed while crying.
"Forgive us, ***-chan, for forcing the role of the Goddess on only you and leaving you alone all this time. We're sorry for only us, your friends, becoming happy… So sorry."
When the girl was called by her real name, all her friends passed away with an apology.
But the girl didn't want crying faces. She only wanted to see smiles, yet all her friends showed her tears at the very end.
Moreover, the tragedy didn't end there. Time slowly passed, her faith weakened and at the same time, the girl lost her divine powers. All that was left to her was… an non-aging body.
…Before she noticed it, no one in the village needed the girl

anymore.
Therefore the girl escaped from the room she was shut in and went on a trip full of anticipation.
Would she find a warm place?
She believed that there ought to be a place for her somewhere. And in fact, she found one right away. Amongst all the people she got close to, there were kind people, who considered the girl as their family.
However, the daily life slowly crumbled with time. She would lose her place every time without fail. All those she came to love, would definitely die before her. Every time, she could only sit at their deathbeds. And she always saw a crying face at the very end.
“Sorry, Elni. I can’t play the guitar anymore. Sorry for leaving you alone.” “Sorry, Elni. I wish I could have cooked and stayed with you more… I’m really sorry for leaving you alone…” “Sorry. I can’t cry with you anymore. I’m sorry for… making you cry all by yourself, Elni.”
Regretting to leave the girl by herself and thinking of the loneliness of the girl whose growth had stopped, the kind people distorted their expressions and shed tears on top of it.
So the expressions of her beloved people in her memory were always just crying faces. The expressions of her beloved people in her dreams were always soaked with tears. And after seeing off her beloved people to the other world one after another, the girl finally decided.
She would no longer live together with anyone. She would become no one’s family.
She wanted to see smiles, yet she made them cry at the very end. Instead of making her precious people cry, she should just stay alone. She should just cry by herself. It was better that way.
Even if she became family with someone, her lifespan was different from others. At some point, she would be alone. Before that happened, she should leave on her own accord. For the sake of not making her precious people cry, and for her own sake…

♥♥!

“…The girl, I have lived like that. During all that, my life with you guys was the best. It made me think for the first time that I’m fine without my beloved mother and don’t need to return to my mother’s house. So I was happy as never before, and scared as never before.”
Painfully clenching her small fists,
“I was scared to no end. My lifespan surely is even longer than a devil’s. Everyone’ll surely die before me. I love everyone so much, yet I can’t live together with them. I can’t die together with them. I can only sit at their deathbeds. You’re kind, Shinobu, so you cry like all the others from seeing me like this. But I’m sick of it.”
Blurring her crimson eyes greatly,
“With my growth stopped, I won’t age. I once crept out everyone by staying in the same place for too long. Getting hated is still better than that.”
Trembling her slender shoulders,
“I don’t want to see any more crying faces. I don’t want to sadden anyone at the very end. I have enough of breaking warm places. I don’t want to… see your crying face in my dreams! Anything but that! I love all of you, so I don’t want to sadden you!”
Raising a crying scream, Elni kept shouting while sobbing.
“Therefore! Therefore! I won’t come back! I won’t go back anywhere! If it only breaks in the end, I don’t want to become anyone’s family anymore! I can’t live together with someone! I’m fine being a stupid… lonely Goddess!”
“…Even if you‘re fine with it, I’m not…”
Stimulated by my emotions in my chest, I gently pulled Elni into an embrace.
“There’s no point in crying by yourself. Just like you don’t want us to cry, I don’t want you to cry either. So I wrecked my brain and came up with a nice idea, Elni.”
Calling upon her heart this time,
“Sure, I might die before you. However, I thought of a way, where neither you or I are crying.”
Holding onto her this time, I looked at Elni and filled my tone with emotion.
“When in the future, after whatsoever years, I get a child, will you become the godparent?”
“Me… the godparent?”

“Yeah, you. I want you to take that role. And you see, I want you to support my child, make it smile and stay by it’s side.”
I was sure that my child would love and admire Elni without doubt.
“And then, when my child grows up, gets married and gets a child of it’s own, I want you to be the godparent for that child this time. Watch over *us* forever.”
“But you’ll…”
“Yeah. I’ll die one day. But I’ll smile. Because I can rest in peace. After all, you’ll be with my child and won’t cry all by yourself.”
Therefore I could really be at ease.
“But well, if you’re scared, you don’t have to see me die. You can just leave me and live with my child somewhere. And before my child dies, you just go somewhere else with my grandchild. If you repeat that, then…”
Increasing the squeeze on her,
“*We* will always be with you. If you feel like crying, we can embrace you like this. We can always be together. You won’t ever need to cry.”
I spoke out my wish straightforward.
“Become my family in that way.”
“I’m… an idiot, you know? And even a glutton. I watch TV non-stop and play video games all day. Not to forget, I selfishly… eat all the snacks…”
“Yeah, and then you show us a smile.”
“…That’s not all… I often take naps… and I might never work.”
“Even so, you’ll always smile at us. That’s how we like you. Even I like you very much. I want to stay with you forever.”
“Even… if I cause… nothing but… troubles to you, Shinobu… you’re fine with me?”
“Yeah, I am. I’m happy to have you as my family. Just promise me one thing.”
Still embracing Elni, I peacefully and gently declared.
“Never cry by yourself from now on. If you have a hard time, you can rely on us anytime.”
“I… don’t have to hold back anymore? You won’t come to hate me, even when I cry?”
“Don’t worry. It’s okay. Whenever you cry now, *we* will by your side. So you don’t have to worry anymore.”

When I petted her head along with kind words, Elni clung tightly to me, as she had endured it for so long with her small body, and cried with a loud weeping. Like a child fawning on it's mother, she spilled all the tears she had been holding back so far without hesitation…
Holding her firmly like that, I thought while my vision started to get blurry from my own tears. That the others would surely remember about Elni once we got home and they saw her face. And then it would be the Christmas party. Together with everyone, without anyone missing, we would celebrate the present day. Because today was the commemoration day that the small Goddess in my arms became a part of our family.

…The quiet residential area. It was already past midnight.
Afterwards, I tried to go home with Elni, but midway we missed the last train, so we had no choice but to use a taxi. Driving down the painfully long highway, I gradually became paler from the fares, then we finally got back to our neighbourhood. However, even though we were still a bit afar from our house, Elni called out to the taxi driver with "We'll get off here" for some reason… Well, that alone wasn't a big deal.
The problem came afterwards. Around the corner we would be able to see our house, yet Elni wasn't moving an inch for a while now. She must be worried after all. After a while, I grabbed her hand to reassure her, whereupon Elni squeezed back on my hand and said quietly.
"…I just can't find the words. Unlike you, the others have forgotten about me. What should I tell them—"

“Elni, it’s your house too, so you don’t need to have any weird reservations. You just have to say ‘I’m home’. I’m sure everyone’ll remember right away.”
At the same time I cut into her words, I slightly increased the squeeze on her hand, whereupon Elni obediently moved on and turned at the corner, where our house finally came into vision.

But for some reason, there was a huge bat on top of our fence.
That bat had something in it's mouth and as soon as it noticed us, it spread it's wing and flew over to Elni. It offered the something in her mouth… a piece of paper to her, then spread it's wings again and flew off somewhere.
"…Might have been Bram's familiar."
Saying so while watching off the bat, Elni unfolded the memo in her hands.
A bit curious, I peeked at her hands, where there was written the obscure message of "A Christmas present from me".
As she didn't understand the meaning behind the message either, Elni put the paper into her pocket while tilting her head, and then headed to our house a bit hesitant together with me.
There our visions fell onto my mother, who stood leaning against the front door despite the late time. Maybe she had been there the whole time. My mother was wearing a coat and when she noticed us, she came straight at us and faced Elni.
"…This is the girl you have been searching for, Shinobu?"
This girl. The treatment of a real stranger. While Elni rocked her eyes a bit, my mother stared at her and started to talk peacefully.
"You seem to be a foreigner. Do you have a place to stay at?"
"…I… once more… here, but… I guess… left once… so I no longer…"
"—Then stay with us."
Elni faintly damped her eyes.
"Be my daughter from today on."
My mother gently held out her hand.
"If you want, I can become your second mother— Elni."
It was the same sentence like before, but calling her name dearly, my mother pulled Elni into an embrace.
Instantly, Elni trembled her voice gravely.
"…Why… are you remembering me… All of you were supposed to have forgotten…"
"Sorry, Elni. I had forgotten about you until today. I didn't even notice until Machina's father came by today."
"Bram came by?"
"Yes. I don't really get it, but he said something about a hypnosis experiment and that he came by to undo it. But to think I fell for it so

easily and forgot about you…”
The Old Man Bram came over to our house. He gave a Christmas present. My mother, having regained her memories, was at a loss for words.
“…You waited in front of the house the whole time, didn’t you? Your body is chilled to the bones. What if you catch a cold…”
Elni tightly returned the hug of my mother and timidly spun her words.
“Hey, were you saying the truth just now? Will you really become my mother?”
“…Of course, Elni.”
While my mother desperately tried to keep her cracked voice in check, Elni immediately started to sob.
“…Will you play with me again?”
“Silly girl. Of course I’ll play with you any time.”
“Then… it’s… a promise… You definitely… have to keep it… This time for sure… I won’t make you cry… Will you… smile together with me this time?”
“You really are silly, Elni. We’re family now, so we cry together and laugh together. We’ll always be together. So don’t leave on your own again, okay? That’s what you have to promise me.”
“…Yeah… I promise…”
Nodding firmly, Elni showed a smile. It was overflowing with tears, but I thought of it as an unusual gem. And I immediately could see that pretty smile once more.
After my mother had embraced Elni for a while, she pushed her back to make her stand in front of the front door. When Elni then entered our house with a bit of hesitation,
“—Welcome home!”
Just how long had they been waiting? The moment Elni opened the door, everyone stood in the entrance hall with a smile. Luna, Machina, Nazuna and even Hijiri and Kaorun. All together they put on a strained smile.
“Welcome home, Elni-chan. Let us take a nap together again, okay? Then I will sing a lullaby. The song you presented me.”
“Welcome home, Elni-oneechan. I still can’t play the guitar well yet. Teach me again next time, okay? And let’s play together again.”
First Luna and Nazuna hurried over to Elni.

“Welcome back, Elni. Actually, I have a Christmas present for you. Luna-san taught me how to knit. This muffler is for you. As thanks for showing me that starry sky.”
“Welcome home, Elni-san. There is a cake served in the living room. I baked it. I will bake another one next time, so please eat it again.”
Hijiri and Kaorun followed after Luna and Nazuna.
“Welcome back, Elni. Teach me… how to cook again. Stay with me again. My room is… too broad… without you…”
While everyone called out to Elni, Machina was the first to cry.
“You stayed with us for so long, yet you disappear on your own and even asked that weird request of my father. Even though I like, even though I love you so much… why did you just disappear… This time… properly become… my older sister… Elni…”
With Machina’s tears as the trigger, everyone’s smiling faces slowly crumbled and the next one to cry was surprisingly Kaorun and then Nazuna.
“That’s no good. Didn’t we decided that we wouldn’t cry when Elni comes back?”
“Hijiri-san is right. We have to welcome her with a smile…”
Even while chiding Machina and the other two, Hijiri and Luna started spilling tears from their eyes too… No one could stop it anymore. Everyone hugged onto Elni and repeated “Welcome home” numerous times.
Amidst that, the embraced Elni said.
“…I never thought it would come back again… yet it did…”
The warm place like a sunny spot. The one thing she gained at the very beginning, then lost in exchange for becoming a Goddess and kept looking for it numerous times, but gave up at some point, yet always desired it.
Elni cried loudly. She returned everyone’s hug tightly, as to confirm their existence, their warmth and to never separate from them again. Surely her long travel ended in this moment.
The girl, who had always been alone, finally found a house to return to. She gained a place where she belonged to.
That was something she always desired. The normal everyday life she yearned for. Even if she herself wasn’t normal, even if she was to part with her beloved people one day, if she kept being surrounded by her beloved people all the time, then…

Ahh… I could no longer hear the sound of rain. It must have stopped. The rain of tears that had fallen in her heart without end… it finally stopped.
While she was embraced by everyone, her tears ceased with time and Elni narrowed her crimson eyes, smiling.
She kept smiling dearly and happily, brighter than any smile.
The rain in her heart was gone. The expression on her face after the rainfall, was a pretty smile like a rainbow in the blue sky. Elni was no longer a Goddess. She was a simple girl, a little bit stupid glutton and our beloved—- family member.
So no matter what kind of fierce rain would fall in the future, Elni surely would never cry all by herself again…

Epilogue

Several days passed since Elni became part of our family and now it was the enjoyable winter vacation.
By the way, I missed my end of term exams, since I was engrossed in my search for Elni, but it seems Sougo-san skilfully pulled some strings. My absences was handled due to an influenza and since I had good grades on my midterm exams, I didn't need to take supplementary lessons at school.
Now I felt like enjoying a good book again after a long time, but since I was short on money, I borrowed a few books from the library today and high-spirited came back all the way to in front the door of my room, but
"Mm… Ahh… Uhn… Hah…"
for some reason I could hear a rather bewitching voice coming from my room. Just who was what doing in my room? I stopped in front of the door and got a bit nervous, whereupon
"Yahn, Haahn, Shinobu-samaa~ If you do that, I will—"
"Hey, you're too noisy. What're you doing in my room?"
Or rather, she definitely must have noticed me. It was quite the affected voice. When I yanked the door open and went inside, there was Kaorun on my bed like expected. On the floor was a big travel bag for some reason. Kaorun looked at me and knitted her eyebrows a bit.
"Shinobu-sama, please knock at least. Even if we two have a close relationship, manners are in order."
"Right back at you. Stop entering my room on your own, getting on my bed and teasing me with a weird voice."
"Just to inform you, I properly received permission to enter your room from Tomoe-san. Because I did my best in the search for Elni-san too, I half-forcefully had Tomoe-san give me a reward as compensation."
"A reward from my mother?"
"Indeed. From today on, I will live in this room. Your roommate. We share the bed and I will use your arm, chest or lap for a pillow. Incidentally, I will offer you my chest pillow depending on the day. It

will envelop you gently.”
“…You want to rob me of my sleep?”
That sounded rather pleasant, but I probably wouldn’t get any sleep from the excitement.
With that impression, I once again faced the travel bag on the floor.
“Anyway, why are you really here? You seriously plan to stay here? Don’t tell me you ran away from the Gogyou Mansion again?”
“No, rather than saying I left it…”
Stopping her words with a light shrug of her shoulders, Kaorun continued with a smile.
“—The truth is, I cut all my ties with the Gogyou Household.”

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